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# **Salford Dadz: Year 2 External Evaluation**

**Professor Steve Robertson, Dr James Woodall, Dr  
Esmée Hanna, Simon Rowlands, Professor Tony Long  
& Dr Joan Livesley**

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University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

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## Executive Summary

The Father's Wellbeing Project ('Salford Dadz') based in Little Hulton, aims to find new ways to improve the wellbeing of local fathers and, through this, the wellbeing of their children. The project is informed theoretically by participatory approaches that aim to identify the 'healthy' practices that help some individuals to find positive solutions to problems and to explore ways to share these with others.

The approach to evaluating the work also used participatory approaches developed initially during year one. Specifically, year two evaluation involved analysis of information from:

- Project Manager and Engagement Worker reflective diary entries
- In-depth interviews from fathers participating in Salford Dadz (conducted by Unlimited Potential but analysed independently by the evaluation team)
- In-depth interviews with women from the Little Hulton community
- Children and young people of families registered as participating in the project (completed by the University of Salford).

This work builds on the year one evaluation and the resulting findings are indicative of the whole programme to date.

### Main Findings

The project has continued to build in terms of the number of fathers involved; both those involved regularly and fully and those involved more intermittently and peripherally.

The men involved, especially those most fully involved, describe how Salford Dadz provides a safe setting and environment in which to share enjoyable social time with other men. In turn, this generates important opportunities for personal sharing and for recognising that many stressful issues they face are common to other men in the community and that positive ways of coping with these issues was possible. In this sense, engagement in Salford Dadz provided an alternative to previous settings and relationships that often fostered negative coping mechanisms (smoking, drinking, social isolation) to stressful situations.

The reported changes that came about for the men from their involvement included:

- A greater sense of positive identity and belonging (feeling cared about and caring for others)
- Improved self-confidence and self-esteem
- Increased engagement in community events including volunteering, education and work opportunities
- Improved relationships with their partners or ex-partners assisted by a greater child focus and therefore more common-ground within these relationships
- Improved opportunities for positive and interesting engagement with their children leading to greater confidence in their parenting ability and skills. This was then said to have a ripple effect leading to greater self-confidence in the children themselves

Whilst not all these were seen in all the men engaging they were certainly common themes and often cumulative – i.e. the greater, longer the involvement the more of these changes were noted.

The women also reported most of the above changes amongst the men. *Both the men and the women reported that Salford Dadz had been 'life-changing' in its impact for many of the men involved.*

In addition, the women saw benefits for themselves in terms of: improved relationships; creating a more positive view about men (for some); greater sharing of the parenting 'burden' (and joy) and; providing them with more time to either relax or develop their own lives and interests.

The data collected from the children and young people is particularly compelling. They reported not only an increased amount of time spent with their fathers but very noticeable improvements in the quality of this time. This was linked to 'happier' dispositions and improved friendships that they noticed their fathers to have developed. This led in a cyclical way to mutual improvements in trust and respect between the children and their fathers, and concomitant improvements in their own behaviour. Some also noted improvements in relationships between their parents and certainly greater enjoyment in relationships within the home.

The concerns expressed toward the end of year one about some women in the community feeling alienated or marginalised by Salford Dadz had mostly been ameliorated by the steps taken to resolve this - however, this needs to continue to be an issue that the project is sensitive to.

The concerns expressed toward the end of year one about sustainability of the work without the charismatic involvement of Unlimited Potential and the engagement worker have been mainly addressed. The necessary replacement of the engagement worker and the formal constituting on the Council of Dadz in Spring 2015 suggests community capacity for the work to continue as Unlimited Potential progress plans to withdraw from the work

There remains some pressure to avoid Salford Dadz being viewed as a service' delivered 'to' the men rather than a project owned by the community. However, an increased external focus and reaching out through media and connecting with local partners, has helped make the nature of the work apparent.

The work is continuing to evolve with fathers themselves taking greater active control of the direction and strategic vision. New ventures are being attempted to continue to ensure the work is diverse and inclusive reaching numerous men within the community and, increasingly, beyond.

## Introduction

The Father's Wellbeing Project ('Salford Dadz', initially called the 'Men's Wellbeing Project') based in Little Hulton, aims to find new ways to improve the well-being of disadvantaged fathers and, through this, the well-being of their children. The project implementation is theoretically informed by positive deviance (PD) which is premised on understanding the uncommon but 'healthy' practices that permit some individuals to find better solutions to problems than their peers (Marsh et al., 2004).

Early evaluation of Salford Dadz after its first year of implementation suggested that the programme made tangible impacts to fathers in Little Hulton and offered a unique response that was not found elsewhere in this community. Moreover, data from year one indicated that Salford Dadz has been exemplary in the way it had engaged and involved local fathers with success attributable to the determination and competencies of a talented project team, spearheaded by a dynamic Project Manager (Woodall et al., 2014).

Despite positive evaluation in year one, there were noteworthy issues in relation to the future development of the project. The sustainability and 'ownership' of Salford Dadz by the men themselves was one salient issue. Indeed, the year one evaluation questioned whether the fathers had enough of the required skills and experience amongst them to maintain and advance the work even if the desire and energy was there. Second, the role of women in the project was unclear with further work required from Salford Dadz to establish if or how women would be integrated into the programme. Finally, the year one evaluation highlighted challenges in measuring the success of Salford Dadz in quantifiable or financial terms (Woodall et al., 2014).

Building on the evaluation findings from year one, Unlimited Potential<sup>1</sup> commissioned the Institute for Health and Wellbeing at Leeds Beckett University to conduct a second year independent evaluation of Salford Dadz. A more extensive methodological design was employed for the year two evaluation (see the following section for further details) which included further analysis of monitoring data; analysis of case study data from fathers involved in Salford Dadz; and interviews with women based in Little Hulton. The evaluation of year two also included two further elements of work: a Social Return on Investment (completed by 'VIE for Life') and an evaluation of the impact on children and young people commissioned separately from the CYP@Salford research group at the University of Salford. Whilst complete reports have been provided separately for both of these, aspects of the children and young people element have also been integrated within this report to give a more complete picture of the impact of the work.

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<sup>1</sup> Unlimited Potential is a social enterprise that specialises in social innovation for happiness. Unlimited Potential facilitates the Father's Wellbeing Project.

## Methodology

The evaluation philosophy in the year two evaluation was consistent with that employed in year one. This included close-working relationships with the Salford Dadz team and adopting a participatory approach to data gathering which recognized and respected individuals' viewpoints and perspectives. The notion of 'triangulating' data sources (i.e. from the programme team, the fathers the women and the children and young people in the community) was a central premise to ensure a holistic picture of Salford Dadz was assembled. Evidence presented in this evaluation report was therefore derived from four primary sources:

1. Project Manager's and Engagement Worker's reflective diary entries completed between August 2014 and May 2015.
2. Qualitative analysis of six in-depth interviews from father's participating in Salford Dadz. These interviews were conducted by Unlimited Potential but analysed independently by the evaluation team.
3. Semi-structured interviews from women within the local community of Little Hulton.
4. A 'mosaic', interactive and multifaceted approach to data collection with children and young people (see Appendix I for detail of this approach)

The first three aspects of the evaluation were approved by the Faculty of Health and Social Sciences Ethics Committee at Leeds Beckett University and the fourth aspect through the University of Salford Research Ethics Committee.

Those fathers interviewed did so voluntarily as part of the study and broadly reflected the characteristics of men participating in Salford Dadz. The women also participated voluntarily and were recruited via a Facebook post on the Salford Dadz site, as well as through the project workers who actively recruited women to the evaluation. A total of seven women were interviewed for this strand of work. These interviews explored the women's views of the project, the activities that were conducted, and the changes (if any) they had seen within the men they knew who attended, and with their children. As many children as possible were invited from 18 months to 16 years of age. Attendance at a Saturday Club was the preferred means of recruitment. Thirteen children from six families took part in the event. Two were girls.

## Analysis

Documentary data was analysed thematically and emergent categories relating to the project aims developed. Data from the interviews with fathers and women were transcribed and also analysed thematically. For the children and young people, audio or video-recorded data was converted to text manually (with additional field notes for video data) for framework analysis. The frame was constructed on fields of impact, context, and mechanisms.

Pseudonyms have been assigned in order to ensure anonymity and any potentially identifying information has been omitted for presentation in this analysis.



*Salford Dadz: Council of Dadz meeting*

## Findings

The following sections present data gathered from the project team, fathers involved with Salford Dadz, women based in the community of Little Hulton and children and young people. Findings are presented thematically reflecting emergent and salient categories from the analysis.

### The project team perspectives

This section provides a thematic summary of emergent issues from the Project Manager's and Engagement Worker's reflective diary entries completed between August 2014 and April 2015 and from other documentary materials (e.g. meeting minutes from the Council of Dadz, monthly progress reports).

#### Continuity and taking control

As noted in the initial evaluation of Salford Dadz, there were concerns about the sustainability of the programme given the reliance on the energy, dynamism and skills of the Project Manager and the

high-level communication and inter-personal abilities of the Engagement Worker to attract men into the programme. The sudden departure of the original Engagement Worker at the end of the first year of the programme (September, 2014) provided an examination of the resilience of Salford Dadz to such staffing shifts. It also offered an opportunity for a different individual to fulfil the Engagement Worker role.

Although replacing the Engagement Worker could have been a potentially difficult time for the programme, this has not been the case. The new Engagement Worker (John Horrocks<sup>2</sup>) has grown into the role despite initial self-doubts:

*'I feel almost overwhelmed by the sense of responsibility and being aware of having to fill some big shoes... I almost felt a sense of guilt taking the role but I knew that this job had to be filled and I have come such a long way with my self-development.'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, August 2014)

The impact in the change in personnel has seemingly had negligible impact on Unlimited Potential or other partners working closely with Salford Dadz. Moreover, and perhaps most significantly, the fathers in Little Hulton have not been affected:

*'I thought with [the previous Engagement Worker] leaving it would have a big impact on the guys but in actual fact it didn't seem to alter anything.'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, August 2014)

This successful continuation of the Engagement Worker is in many ways unsurprising, given that the new worker has been embedded in Salford Dadz, is well-versed in understanding the local community dynamics and has the attributes clearly needed for success, as observed here:

*'I could see that this 'going the extra mile' action from [the Engagement Worker] was not lost on the fathers.'* (Project Manager's reflective diary, August 2014)

There is growing evidence of fathers themselves taking more active control and ownership of the programme. As their confidence and skills increase they are more likely to make suggestions and see themselves as an active part in managing how the programme develops:

*'One dad asked me if he would be ok to meet some of the dads on the Armitage public house car park so they knew where to go from there. I was very pleased as this was my first time as Engagement Worker where the dads had started to take the lead and initiative to plan things*

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<sup>2</sup> John is a local resident and Unlimited Potential recruited him from within the Council of Dadz, using a formal recruitment process

*for themselves. The fact that he asked still shown me that the dads felt they didn't own it totally.'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, September 2014)

*'It was clear this time round that the dads were doing a lot more for themselves and were pretty much self-organised on the day.'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, October 2014)

The formal constitution of the Council of Dadz (see picture below) is further illustration of the fathers taking greater control from the Project Manager and, in effect, 'standing on their own'. Effective exercises in identifying individual fathers' assets have provided a structure to the Council whereby those with specific skills and capabilities have been given responsibility to manage and lead elements of Salford Dadz:

*'Heather had come up with a fun activity for the Council of Dadz. The idea was to clip paper to the back of each other and in turn they wrote what they thought the other's strengths were. For me, this had multiple purposes. One for obviously boosting the fathers confidence and to also highlight others skills ahead of the roles they each could take.'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, February, 2015)



*Salford Dadz first AGM: Signing the constitution - April 2015*



## Social media

It is clear from the documentary data that social media continues to play a productive role in Salford Dadz. While early in the programme, social media, particularly Facebook, was used as a way to raise awareness of Salford Dadz and to help engage men (and interestingly women), it is now also harnessed as a tool to build alliances across the community with other organisations and individuals. This is exemplified by an extract from the Project Manager:

*'The community garden at Cleggs Lane ... was vandalised not once but twice. I approached Dad 19, who works regularly in the garden, about how the fathers could help. I agreed with him to place a post on Facebook to declare our support for the fathers and grandfathers working there, some of who were elderly and much-respected and to ask local dads to keep an eye on the place.'*



Picture: Salford Dadz' Facebook post asking fathers to be vigilant to prevent vandalism





Picture: Facebook insights: 62% of fans are local females

### Perpetual innovation

The significant ability of the programme to engage men from within the community was highlighted in the previous evaluation report. Developing appropriate 'hooks' to assist with engaging fathers



(and their children) remains a salient constituent of programme success. What is also noticeable however is the greater sense of purpose that these events now have. The new 'Brew and Banter' club, as an example, is designed to enable fathers to talk *'openly and frankly away from the children in a different environment'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, January 2015). This, in effect, complements the Saturday Dads Club where fathers are accompanied by their children and the focus is rightly on interaction with them: *'Talking at Dads club can be a little challenging for the fathers when also trying to watch their children.'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, January 2015)

Picture: Brew and Banter Club

Other examples of innovation have been seen in relation to the emerging 'Men's Shed' initiative – currently a 'spin-off' from the Salford Dadz initiative. The shed building is arguably a hook that fosters fathers working together in socially engaging 'fun' ways and also in helps with building intergenerational bonds.

### **Salford Dadz connecting 'inwards' and 'outwards'**

A critique of Salford Dadz in its inception was that it was a predominantly inward looking, focussing on identifying the needs and strengths (assets) of local fathers (using the PD framework) and their children and lending peer support where appropriate. This continues to be a feature of Salford Dadz and an important element of success:

*'It struck me just what O3 would do if he didn't have Salford Dadz, there's little anybody can do in this instance but knowing he has all of us dads around the corner has given him confidence and a safety net he wouldn't have had before.'* (Engagement Worker's reflective diary, August 2014)

There have been conscious strategies to avoid labelling Salford Dadz as 'a service', and instead to maintain a focus on the programme as building and embedding community resilience and capacity. However, the 'medical model' and 'service delivery' discourse is pervasive and often difficult to resist, especially given new funding structures for Salford Dadz via the Clinical Commissioning Group. That said, the Project Manager has remained resolute on this issue:

*'I am clear that we are not trying to develop Salford Dadz as a service but as part of the resilience of the community, but we are pressured by both services and residents to call it a 'service' and treat it as such, with the risk that residents will become passive not active.'* (Project Manager's reflective diary, November 2014)

It is clear that as the programme has developed, so has the ambitions and outward focus of Salford Dadz. Their embracing of a social model, rather than a medical one, is clear in this strategy. The programme has engaged and made connections with a myriad of local partners – some connections have fostered fruitful relationships, others less so – and also national bodies (i.e. an invitation to speak at the national NHS Alliance conference in London). An important development in the work is that organisations are now much more willing to listen to Salford Dadz given the persistence of the Project Manager, but also as a result of their growing external recognition and reputation as an organisation. As an illustration of this, in October 2014, the Project Manager and Engagement Worker were both invited to speak on BBC local radio.



Picture: Facebook post promoting radio interview with Salford DJ Mike Sweeney

The growing profile of Salford Dadz is paying dividends allowing them a greater voice in local decision-making and affairs. As a further example, local health visitors took time out to listen to the work of the programme, although on this occasion reflections from the Project Manager suggested there were difficulties in health visitors fully grasping a new model of working:

*'The HVs were glad to see us – they had been 'referring' fathers to us but did not know exactly what Salford Dadz is about. We told the fathers' stories of alienation and separation ... They concluded with the offer of setting up a father-focused antenatal clinic and connecting us with a male health visitor. I had to explain to them that what we are about is the reverse of service delivery; it is about sharing the community's own wisdom. We concluded that they did not understand at all what we are about and perhaps never would.'*

(Project Manager's reflective diary, August 2014)

### **The continued search for PD behaviours: process or outcome?**

The complex challenges faced by individual fathers (alcohol, drugs, gambling), families (separation, violence) and the wider community of Little Hulton (social and economic challenges, poverty, unemployment) are still acutely present. The individual narratives of some fathers, presented in the documentary data, reveal the entrenched difficulties they face and the challenges posed in coping with their situation. Nonetheless, in spite of the circumstances, many fathers within Salford Dadz are successfully managing; or at least showing resilience in often adverse contexts. This suggests that PD behaviours are present in the community of fathers, but disentangling what the 'tangible ingredient' is can be illusive. Whether defining this ingredient actually matters is open for debate. Moreover, it

could be that PD behaviours vary contingent on specific circumstances and that there are several ingredients, or PD behaviours, necessary to cope as a father in Little Hulton. The PD philosophy and application to Salford Dadz was neatly encapsulated by the Project Manager:

*'I am still uncertain about whether the PD is where men abandon their pride and admit problems openly and tell positive stories of how they have overcome them to give hope to others or whether the PDs are the individual extraordinary behaviours of fathers who have overcome problems. Talking to [a colleague], he thinks that we should focus on 'great dads' and why they are great, which is another way of looking at PD. It may be that whatever is making Salford Dadz work (because it is) does not fit with PD and we should not force it as a paradigm. It might just be a form of self-help. At the moment we remain open to all possibilities.'*

As the project moves forward, it may be that the original PD framework which shaped practice and ways of working is abandoned and replaced with other theoretical frameworks such as social movement theory.

### **Expanding horizons?**

There have been discussions in relation to the expansion of Salford Dadz beyond Little Hulton. Early attempts to set up 'pop-up games' to engage fathers and children in areas outside of Little Hulton have been challenging, but it is apparent that time and building credibility and rapport within communities is an important element to any success. One of the consistent strengths of the programme has been the engagement in theory to aid practice. This has been exemplified through the typology of fathers which has developed significantly. These typologies - 'Mr. Happy', 'Mr. Strong', 'Mr. Good', 'Mr. Bump', 'Mr. Bounce', 'Mr. Clever', and 'Mr. Impossible' - continue to encapsulate the men that are being encountered in Little Hulton. As external evaluators, we feel that the typology provides a very useful tool with which to start building engagement strategies outside of Little Hulton. The useful application of the typology is evident as noted by the Project Manager:

*'At the time of analysis we counted 70 fathers, the majority of whom were 'Mr. Bounces' – dads who have hit the bottom and are on their way up, and 'Mr. Strong's' – strong fathers offering help, such as the Rotarians, and 'Mr. Goods' – mostly from the several churches we work alongside.'* (Project Manager's reflective diary, April 2015)

*Table 1: A description of the Mr Men typologies*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>'Mr Happy'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be newcomer or native</li> <li>• With partner</li> <li>• Job and house ok or retired</li> <li>• Happy and stable, with the usual family issues which he overcomes</li> <li>• Has hobbies and interests</li> <li>• Includes foster fathers and stand in fathers</li> <li>• Likely to be a Men Behaving Dadly winner</li> <li>• Curious about Salford Dadz but feels he doesn't need it</li> <li>• May need persuading directly that he has wisdom to offer other dads</li> </ul>       | <p><b>'Mr Bounce'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native to Little Hulton</li> <li>• Has faced serious difficulties, especially around relationships - and won</li> <li>• Doesn't know how exceptional he is</li> <li>• Has grown as a person in some way – got a job, started a course, volunteered, become fitter and healthier</li> <li>• Likely to be spotted by services who helped him and put him in contact with Salford Dadz</li> <li>• Likely to be role models (positive outliers) for others when found by Salford Dadz</li> <li>• Likely to be a Men Behaving Dadly winner</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>'Mr Strong'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native to Little Hulton</li> <li>• Strong sense of family and community</li> <li>• Happy and stable, with the usual family issues which they overcome</li> <li>• Already volunteering, with many skills</li> <li>• Appears at various community events and meetings</li> <li>• May be too used to offering 'services' rather than the community learning from itself</li> <li>• Interested in helping Salford Dadz</li> </ul>  | <p><b>'Mr Clever'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a relative newcomers to Little Hulton</li> <li>• Has a professional background</li> <li>• Facing difficult times: redundancy, separation</li> <li>• Keeps going despite everything</li> <li>• Can become socially isolated due to background being different from other local men</li> <li>• Confident and resourceful enough to see Salford Dadz leaflets/Facebook and make it to events without help</li> <li>• May have skills to offer Salford Dadz but because of work/job-seeking may have difficulty finding the time</li> </ul>       |
| <p><b>'Mr Good'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part of a family that has lived in Little Hulton for generations – all in stable partnerships</li> <li>• Close knit group of granddads, dads and children</li> <li>• Strong links to church – worshipping, working, volunteering or socialising together</li> <li>• Likely to offer pastoral help to other dads, but sometimes find it hard to relate to them</li> <li>• Good observer of Little Hulton life to share with Salford Dadz</li> </ul>   | <p><b>'Mr Impossible'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local man who has abandoned his children and partner(s) or has a chaotic relationship with them</li> <li>• Likely to be offending/in prison</li> <li>• Has several children by different partners</li> <li>• Likely to avoid or ignore Salford Dadz, but may reach a critical moment when he might want their help</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>'Mr Bump'</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local, but may have moved around due to tenancy issues</li> <li>• May be a young dad with a partner</li> <li>• On or below the bread line</li> <li>• Likely to have mental health and addiction issues</li> <li>• Hard to engage – reluctant to admit he has problems</li> <li>• Can become socially isolated</li> <li>• Little confidence in self and trust in others</li> <li>• Will only engage with Salford Dadz with persistent one to one effort and has the most to gain</li> </ul> |   |

## The dads' perspectives

The follow section was generated from in-depth interviews with six male attendees of Salford Dadz. A number of key thematic areas and patterns were identified in these frank and sometimes emotional conversations and these are explored in detail below.

### Contemporary fatherhood – sensitivity and strength

In discussing their ambitions for fatherhood, it was common for the men to draw on their experiences of their own parents, offering examples which were seen as positive models and a source of emulation, as well as highlighting what they regarded as some of the potential pitfalls. These observations were often framed within a cultural or historical context, emphasising what was perceived to be a changing definition of fatherhood. On balance, the conversation focused more on negative than positive experiences, ranging from frequently absent working fathers through to fewer instances of passive, negligent or abusive relationships.

Most numerous were descriptions of traditional breadwinning, distant fathers who, while commended for putting food on the table had provided little in the way of emotional support or advice. For example, Charlie talks about his hard working ‘*weekend Dad*’, while Lee’s father working away regularly also did night shifts and tended to sleep through the day. He describes how this affected their early relationship by restricting opportunities for talking over problems and for emotional closeness, leaving his mother to be his ‘*emotional provider*’. This lack of paternal support is both echoed and implicated in Jay’s and Lee’s early experiences of being bullied, and in needing a reliance on wider family members for emotional support. All have a sense of having missed out on fatherly advice and emotional input. This model of purely functional, financial, fathering support was generally perceived as outdated and increasingly described as a thing of the past, and especially rare now in Little Hulton where the majority of parents are separated, unemployment is high and both parents are expected to work when they can.

Beyond the family, the men contemplated the statutory provision of welfare and support, both historically and in a more modern parenting context, and reached generally negative conclusions. For Charlie, Shaun and Jay, the combination of declining or inadequate support is the reason given for an increasing use of alcohol as a crutch or way of forgetting or dealing with day to day worries. These claims are illustrated in histories of drinking fathers, personal youthful intoxication and the use of alcohol in the wider local community in general. For instance, Charlie and Kevin use these examples of emotionally detached, drinking or absent working fathers as a way of reflecting on their own aspirations, resolving that they both wanted and were required to be a different kind of father:

*‘But me Dad never did anything I do for my kids... I think it’s just a different idea of parenting. I need, it’s not just with me kids, it’s in life in general, I feel a need to show people, or I want to show people a caring side.’* (Charlie)

Those who had had more positive experiences, which they felt were worthy of emulation, characterised a good father as one who could show emotion, affection, closeness and empathy. The

majority of the men explain their desire to be a *'hands on father'*. Lee talks about the importance of gaining trust, while others aim to create a parenting environment where the children feel able to come to them and talk about anything. The consensus was that strength and sensitivity were equally valued in a successful, modern father:

*'I learned a lot from me Dad. He was a very sensitive man as well, but he always made sure that he told me he loved me and that's a tradition I've carried on with my son ... And I think it's creating that bond.'* (Kevin)

### Relationship with mum

In addition to models of parenting from their own childhood experiences, the men also discussed the influence of partners, mothers or stepmothers. Most of the men were separated or single, more often than not detailing difficult relationships with the children's mothers. Adam talks about his son's response to his divorce:

*'... he'd lost a lot of his confidence, he'd lost his Mum, he'd lost everything. He just didn't have anything left, he'd just lost everything. And I built him back up again ...'* (Kevin)

The most common reaction to the trauma of separation in the men was isolation and a decline in mental health, caused largely by what was viewed as a long, expensive and unbalanced legal process, and anxiety caused by the perceived inevitability for most of restricted access to children:

*'And I didn't want the kids to have a part-time dad, which was the best case scenario but that wasn't looking good 'cause of the way she was dealing with the break up.'* (Charlie)

Even for the men who gained custody, the process of separation was described as having a long-term and negative impact which frequently resulted in inconsistent parenting. In many instances, the men made a link between the health and well-being of all family members, whatever the marital status. Lee reflects this sentiment in extolling the benefits of Salford Dadz with a philosophical observation that such interventions benefit everybody in Little Hulton:

*'If the men are happy, the women are happy'.*

In making such links, the dads showed interesting insight in terms of gender relations, recognising how things that impact them also concomitantly impact others. As Robertson (2007) points out, such insight challenges traditional masculinity stereotypes of men being irresponsible as fathers and lacking in care for others.

### Troubled childhoods and reaching a low point

Unsurprisingly, given the contexts in which they were set, most of the men describe a pattern of variously troubled stages of childhood and adolescence, overcoming issues with poor mental health, alcohol, drugs, abuse and anger. For example, Charlie had a history of agoraphobia, anxiety and depression increasingly being reliant on alcohol to cope with the hopelessness he felt as a result of early abuse. Similarly, Jay's adolescent drinking habits ultimately found him in trouble with the law. Both describe social isolation, little support and low expectations of life, both from themselves and from those around them, seeing no way out and no potential for improvement into the future. Jay recounts a conversation with a policeman who had known him as a youth, who was later surprised to see him working, expecting him instead to be dead or in prison.

Many of the men describe reaching a low point, where, confronted with the responsibilities of fatherhood, they were forced into making stark choices. For Shaun, extended court battles resulted in ever decreasing access to his children. Spending two consecutive Christmases alone, culminating in police intervention at the mother's home, led to a cycle of deepening depression and drinking which took him to the brink of suicide. Stopped only at the last moment by the thought of his children, he made a decision '*do the things a father should*', beginning this journey alone by giving up alcohol.

Low points and turning points for Jay and Charlie were also related to drinking and depression, in the latter when the combination resulted in him missing the birth of his first child, and in the former in an ultimatum from his partner:

*'She said you either choose the beer or the baby, and I chose the baby and since then I've not drank'. (Jay)*

Kevin talks about sleeping on a park bench for two months after a relationship breakdown, where referral to sheltered accommodation is restricted to him through unsympathetic children's services. He describes feeling confused and messed up, not knowing who to turn to or where to go, eventually becoming ill and hospitalised:

*'I had no help from nobody'. (Kevin)*

For Kevin, being a single father and a primary carer in Little Hulton was an isolating experience. He describes struggling alone with little or no support. This led to feelings of stress and depression and eventually reached breaking point where Salford Dads intervened:



*'Well, when I first found this group I was in dire crisis, and I'm not afraid to say that. I was in turmoil, didn't know what to do. I had no one to turn to, no one to speak to. I felt alone.'* (Kevin)

Although frequently unplanned, children often provided the drive and motivation to prompt self-improvement; the prospect and reality of becoming a father replaced apathy and hopelessness with a clearer sense of purpose and meaning. The majority of men mapped their children's happiness, health and well-being onto their own:

*'...it's like a cliché, you just want your kids to be happy, ... 'cause without you being happy yourself, your kids are not happy. I see me kids upset when I'm upset. I think I got upset last week and me eldest lad, he's so sensitive and he just picks up on everything and I was sad so he was sad. He didn't understand why he was sad he just knew his dad was sad. So to be happy as a dad is very important.'* (Charlie)

In this way, they related their own recovery as inextricably tied to their children's well-being, framing their desire for self-improvement as a motivator and giving them strength to be a better father for their children.

### **Desire for self-improvement – showing strength by asking for help**

Where the men had made the decision to become active, hands-on, strong and sensitive fathers, many recognised a need or had a desire for self-improvement in terms of parenting skills and knowledge:

*'It's about self-improvement you know and how you think that would improve you and what direction you think you was going in ...'* (Charlie)

Stepfather Kevin became aware through a family conflict of his own limitations. He had received no real prior guidance on how to be a parent. With little understanding with regard to setting boundaries, and feeling unsure of the 'rules', he says:

*'Being a dad for the first time I thought I was doing what was right.'* (Kevin)

In recognising this need for help and improvement, many tapped into both informal networks and statutory support services, either directly for parenting advice, or as a way of improving personal health and their own capacity to engage as a father. The data reveals mixed experiences of such help seeking.

Shaun had valued the contribution of counselling services for his alcohol dependency, and had learned to use sign language in a school-based service which he felt helped him bond better with his

autistic son. Adam had attended parenting classes which gave him strategies for coping with his son's ADHD until the point where he and his wife split up where access for him became more difficult. Charlie and Kevin talk of benefitting from mental health, respite and legal support services. When experiences of support services were positive, this increased the men's trust, confidence and willingness to engage further, and for some these had provided a direct referral routes into SALFORD DADZ.

However, when considered overall, the men more commonly describe parenting support that is tailored to the needs and preferences of women. There were numerous examples where men had felt 'pushed out' of vital, informal, playground 'mothers' networks at school, from statutory maternity and post-natal services, and from children's services in general. For one man, there was a fear that motivations for accessing the more informal networks could be misconstrued:

*'It's not that they're being intentionally awkward or anything like that, it's because they just don't know how to approach you ... they think 'oh if me boyfriend sees me he might think I'm trying to flirt'. But it's not ... And once they realised you wasn't a threat to them ... I think we need to understand that we're all parents together at the end of the day. And it's not about that, it's about the kids, nothing to do with the parents ... But you've got to be involved with mums at the end of the day, or your kid misses out on children's parties and thing like that.'* (Kevin)

More men felt that exclusion resulted from a cultural assumption that parenting support was a female domain, and that the term itself was synonymous with motherhood:

*'I'd interacted with midwives and hospitals, it's so female orientated from my perspective, even ... obviously the focus has got to be on the pregnant woman because she's pregnant, but even going down to the Sure Start when it was learning how to wean, there was just no dad about and that in itself made me feel that maybe I'm being, I shouldn't even be here then. And it was just about the mum and baby, mum and baby. You read, you pick up a book and its mum and baby. So I kind of felt pushed out in a way.'* (Charlie)

This perception that services cater for only one style of parenting was extended by men who felt that single parents were integrated less well into service design, and made to feel less welcome:

*'... I think that's the only course I've ever heard of that males could go to, and I got that on a technicality because apparently you are supposed to go with your partner. See there's no set thing for a single parent, a father to go to one.'* (Kevin)

Lee discusses similar experiences resulting from his wife's disability which sometimes prevents her from taking the kids to the local children's centre. He finds this environment less accommodating for fathers and so in this respect, feels that the standard parenting support services do not reflect his own family's needs and interests. Kevin succinctly summarises a general sentiment:

*'... I wish there was more stuff out there for dads to do with their children.'* (Kevin)

Such experiences of fathers feeling excluded are not new and have been highlighted in research for some time (e.g. Burgess, 1997; Williams & Robertson, 1999).

In addition to the perception of largely feminised parenting support and exclusion, some of the men have more general concerns; here, Jay associates social services with suspicion and surveillance:

*'...Dads are put off by that... I'm just gonna be here to get watched...'* (Jay)

Several further examples of a mistrust of men are given for hospital accident and emergency admissions and children's centres. These prior experiences influenced the way men perceived support services for fathers and were discussed in relation to Salford Dadz in two ways. Firstly, it linked into their desire for self-improvement. Whether previous efforts had been received positively or not, the men rejected stereotypical assumptions of male help seeking as a weakness, defining it instead as a sign of resilience and the personal strength to care for and protect others. This philosophy they felt was supported and nurtured through their engagement with Salford Dadz:

*'My struggle was pride, I think, in that accessing services that I thought was for the weak, but it's not, it's to make you stronger. To make me stronger and that's what it was for ...'* (Charlie)

Secondly, in describing their experiences of 'other services', men were able to identify what was different, successful and important to them about Salford Dadz.

### **A different approach - Salford Dadz**

Although the men were conscious at differing levels of the theoretical ambitions of the project in identifying examples of positive deviance, it was within the context described above that Salford

Dadz was largely described as offering broad support for fathers which no other 'service' had been able to do. Interestingly, Kevin compared the function of alcohol and Salford Dadz in filling a void in terms of support. In this metaphor, alcohol offered some compensation or alternative to limited coping resources, leading to a downward spiral into the abyss. He proposed a more positive remedial solution:

*'There was a void there and I used Salford Dadz as a ladder really.'* (Kevin)

From the data, Salford Dadz's '*support ladder*' out of the parenting darkness and isolation many men felt could be characterised as operating at a number of different levels. These have been grouped into the following sub themes.

### **Not the only one**

Isolation was a common thread in the data and occurred for a variety of reasons and often a combination of these. Ill-health, addiction, worklessness, poverty and lack of financial resources, being a single parent, relationship breakdown, or simply being new to the area were all reasons for isolation. Alternatively, Salford Dadz provided a valued place to meet and talk over common concerns, which the men felt was positive for their physical and emotional health, providing them with increased resources for coping.

Despite some initial scepticism of community groups, overwhelmingly the men talked of Salford Dadz as a place of empathy and solidarity. Salford Dadz represented a rare male space where people would listen to, share and understand their problems. They felt they could be honest and open amongst others who were going through similar issues. This engendered a trust and responsibility between and toward each other, providing validation that their experiences of fatherhood were common and normal and that solutions to certain issues, or support to endure them, could be found. In this context, the men broke free from their isolation and began to realise they were not alone:

*'... that day ... every bloke stood up and said exactly the same thing as I did. They had exactly the same problem. So it wasn't just me, and that made me feel a whole lot better, because knowing that you're not on your own is a massive part of understanding ... 'cause you do start to isolate yourself and you think 'why is it just me?' and you start to go into yourself.'* (Kevin)

The opportunity to meet and talk with other dads had reduced the feeling of anxiety many men had felt. Lee is reassured that he is not alone, has a sense of relief in discussing similar problems with other men and is able to share stories and strategies for coping. Shaun feels that everyone is there for each other in a group of lads who all want what is best for their children; there is a shared sense of identity and purpose. Sharing with the group had helped him to overcome his shyness and lack of belief in himself. He becomes emotional when describing how he has 'come out of his shell' and that his daughter is proud of him for going to Salford Dadz. The result of this is a sober father who now has weekend access to his children and regards the men (and woman) at Salford Dadz as 'friends and family'.

Charlie also talks about the value of having social time with other men, chatting about 'non-dad stuff'. This is especially important for those men, like Kevin, who moved in from outside the area or Shaun who has distanced himself from his old drinking friends:

*'I'm feeling happier, more positive that I'm meeting new friends, getting on ok, I'm talking to them freely ... 'cause I don't have many friends up in XXXXXX XXXXX'. (Kevin)*

### **Being listened to, empathy**

Kevin felt that willingness and opportunities for men to express or discuss issues of fatherhood were rare, and when Salford Dadz had provided an appropriate forum for this he was surprised at the response:

*'I tell you what, I was very depressed when I first came to the group ... that first day I've never seen a bunch of men open up so much. And it was kind of a sight to see, and I thought it just goes to show that it's not ... it's not just women that ... men have got, are sensitive as well, it's just that... what it is is that we've just not got the opportunity to open up to each other.'* (Kevin)

This resonates with the masculinities literature which suggests that assumptions of stereotypical male stoicism are explained more convincingly as a consequence of largely unsympathetic contexts and settings, rather than as an essential and static male trait (Robertson, 2007).

Lee talks about how Salford Dadz gave him a space for release from a tendency to repress or 'bottle up' his problems, which inevitably resulted in 'outbursts'. He tells how the support and conversation of men in a similar situation and the stories of those who have 'come out the other side' reduced his own anxiety but also reduced his need to 'burden' his wife with negative behaviours.

### Building trust and responsibility

This empathetic approach did not only have an individual therapeutic effect, but was felt to impact through the men's increased self-esteem on the health and well-being of their children. By actively listening and responding to the men's interests, mutual trust was built and the men were empowered. For example, Jay talks about how a willingness to take seriously his views and experiences gave him confidence and made him 'feel important'. He recounts how a process which placed value on the contribution he made ultimately inspired him to develop volunteering opportunities where his insights could be shared with others beyond the Salford Dadz group. In this sense, he describes how the responsibility given to him by Salford Dadz made him feel trusted, which acted to validate his own efforts in beating his addiction issues and improving his own mental health. This in his view has a positive and transferable effect, not just on the other men who benefited from his perspective, but on his own children's health and well-being in having a more confident and expressive father.

Similarly, Kevin describes the boost to his self-worth in his first meeting with Salford Dadz where his parenting opinions were sought and valued. He too talks of how this was developed within Salford Dadz over time as he was asked to contribute more:

*'But once I started engaging I felt important for a huge amount of reasons, being talked to like I was human ... I felt important when I was asked to do some judging ... I felt like Simon Cowell for a little bit (laughs) ... It's quite official, I loved that and to be asked to do that was a massive thing for me. 'Cause again it's like responsibility you know, and I needed that because ... you know I was talking about a driving force before, what drives me, and it is a bit of somebody else wanting you, or a bit of needing you, just that is enough.'* (Kevin)

### Concrete opportunities for development

In improving opportunities for social contact, building trust and responsibility, Salford Dadz caters for the men's expressed desire for self-improvement. This came in straightforward ways relating to everyday skills for fatherhood. For instance, Kevin talks of a useful yardstick by which personal efforts could be socially measured and compared:

*'I felt a failure because I had no one to measure up to – because everyone needs someone to go 'right, well am I doing it right?' Because we all have these insecurities.'* (Kevin)

Men drew on their own experiential learning to share successes and failures, discussing with each other how they had coped with the pressures of fatherhood and life:

*'We're all parents, and that's what's important, we are all getting ideas. It was quite evident from the first meeting that we could learn skills off other people ...' (Tom)*

Their experience of Salford Dadz inspired the men to reach beyond the immediate group and focus on improving their own circumstance, to actively seeking opportunities to find and engage with others struggling with similar issues. Three men felt they had something to offer in terms of local addiction support in the community:

*'I can bring my experiences of growing up and the battles with alcohol to the table, and I can show people, look, it can be done.'* (Jay)

Kevin talks about his efforts to establish a local group for parents of children with special needs, seeing this as a positive move in his own development. Lee describes becoming extremely active within the Council of Dadz and feels passionate about helping locally isolated fathers. For Charlie, involvement in Salford Dadz led directly to a new and positive direction in his life, including paid employment:

*'... and all of a sudden I've got all of these opportunities that ... and it's because I've gone with it (Salford Dadz) and I'm doing these things ... opportunities just keep opening for me and they wasn't there before ..., joking aside that's how much it has improved my life. I didn't have a diary before, I've now got alarm notification on me diary to allow me to remember to ... that's how many things I've got going on. But that's just like from nothing to everything'. (Charlie)*

In summary, these themes reflect the men's own experiences of fatherhood and of Salford Dadz. They draw on their own parents and childhood memories as models to copy, condemn or amend. Separation was both common and traumatic for all involved, where the health of individuals within the family could not be taken in isolation from each other. Modern fatherhood was viewed as complex and often difficult, a good father was defined as being equally strong and sensitive.



*Picture: Father's Day Fete 2015: Constructing one of the stalls*

Spending time with and showing affection for, children was important. Many had difficult early lives or reached a crisis point where fatherhood had prompted them to reconsider their life choices and attempt to improve their circumstances, knowledge and skills. Most had felt isolated. Alcohol provided an immediate but ultimately destructive solution for some. The majority of support services for parents were viewed as inadequate, pushing out fathers and those who did not fit what was seen as a narrow and outdated family model.

Salford Dadz was different in its approach to fathers and filled a gap, reducing the sense of isolation by listening; by validating men as fathers by valuing, trusting and giving them responsibility; and by developing everyday practical skills and concrete opportunities for self-development.

Finally, what came through very strongly was the way in which the fathers spoke of themselves and the staff of Salford Dadz largely interchangeably and without distinguishing one from the other. This created the sense of closeness in terms of relationships, power, influence and commonality of purpose. More succinctly, this came across as an effective and democratic partnership approach. In instances when staff were discussed individually or directly, it was invariably to highlight the dedication, positive attitude and contribution of the project workers and managers:

*'If more dads were open about the way they feel, and more open about their experiences then maybe it will be better. Maybe they could become better parents. I'm*



*not saying all dads are bad parents, just that they might be able to interact better or find new ways of parenting ... he understands that I've been through crap and he can relate on some aspects...' (Jay)*

## The women's perspectives

### Benefits of the project

The women interviewed predominantly demonstrated a positive attitude towards the project, and all those interviewed strongly identified aspects they recognised as benefits of the Salford Dadz work. Such benefits included: accessibility of the project; structure and opportunity for father and child time; and social inclusion.

### Accessibility of the project

A recurrent theme from the women was that Salford Dadz provides activities/events/provision that is free and thus highly accessible.

The Saturday Club is seen as a great outlet for men and their children. The women identified free provision, such as the Saturday Club, as something particularly needed in the area of Little Hulton, where the availability, or not, of resources has a significant impact on what families can and cannot do in terms of accessing leisure time activities:

*'I just think it's great for the dads that don't have anything else to do ... I mean what else you can do if you have no money, do you sit them in front of the telly ... you're not doing anything with them and then they're not learning anything.'* (Natasha)

*'... it's something for them to do on the weekend as well it's on the Saturday, something that doesn't cost.'* (Clare)

*'I just think it's a positive thing for like all men cos it's nothing really, there isn't really, where do you take, what's for kids on the weekend? There's nothing.'* (Marie)

*'I mean there's parents that haven't got the money or don't know where things are ... so dads who only see kids on weekend, it must be really hard for him especially if they've not got the money, 'where do I take my kids?''* (Natasha)

The fact the project also fundraises in order to facilitate other outings that are further afield offers families additional opportunities they would be otherwise unable to access:

*'like take the kids out have a fun trip which is always nice cos not everybody can afford'* (Marie)

The lack of cost of various Salford Dadz activities was seen as a benefit for the entire group, i.e. not just in relation to the Saturday Club, but also the 'Brew and Banter' and the Council of Dadz.

However, the women identify that the accessibility of the project extends beyond just this issue of 'free access'; it offers men somewhere to go away from previous bad habits and somewhere positive to take their children which doesn't require continual thinking about low cost activities they might do with them:

*'They're not sitting at a pub, they are not drinking all the time and wasting their money. It's not costing them so they've still got a place they can go'* (Natasha)

*'... it's expensive as well ... which is another good thing with Salford Dadz cos they can go for nothing which is good for the dads, obviously, that maybe they are on their own with the kids or if they only have the kids for the weekends. I mean I only saw my dad on weekend when I was younger and it was always difficult for him to decide where we'd go.'* (Natasha)



*Picture: Father's Day Fete 2014 "Throw a wet sponge at your dad"*

The fact that the Saturday dads and kids club is a weekly occurrence is also viewed positively:

*'people with hardly any money can't afford to go out with their kids. They come here for an hour or two always on Saturday morning.'* (Rachel)

The project then is also accessible in terms of offering 'things to do', which is viewed as major benefit for men, who are perceived by the women as not always knowing what to do with their children when entertaining them:

*'I think having the group there as well, it stops some of the dads that maybe don't often have the kids thinking, 'oh we will just go to the pub and you will be fine sat with men' ... it's something positive for the dads to do with the kids, somewhere to go.'* (Natasha)

*'I think some men, um ... do have ideas about what to do like football or some kind of sport and when that's finished then they go 'what else can I do, what else can I do?' It's just about sitting down and listening to what the child would like to do with their dad.'* (Laura)

### **Structure and opportunity for father and child time**

Leading on from the accessibility of the project and providing activities for men to take their children to, women also commented on the importance of 'structure' which had quickly become assimilated into their family routines:

*'... it's worked out a lot better knowing that there is something every week for them ... we have to write it in the calendar so he knows he is out ... he is like I go for Salford Dadz then I go swimming then I can do whatever ... It's important to him that he goes every week to it, meaning even if he was feeling poorly he'd still want to go.'* (Natasha)

Attendance at the group by dads and their children has been incorporated into family life in other ways, such as giving the families an additional topic of conversation and something to share between them, which the women speak about in positive terms. For mums at home when the family go, they enjoy the interaction on the return of the family:

*'I think it's about what happens when they come home and I'm happy to see that they are all like 'oh we did this today, we did that today' and I think to separate yourself from what is it that they are doing.'* (Gill)

*'they come home, 'mum look what I made''* (Rachel)

For families who have shared custody, they hear about the group on their children's return from being with their fathers:

*'I always get feedback from my daughter, she says 'yeah it's really good'.'* (Laura)

Thus, the time that the mums have away from their partners and children adds a welcome additional dimension into their daily life:

*'... and when they come home I get to hear what they've done ... so it kind of gives you something different to talk about with the kids coz normally mums are just like after you've done doing your homework, it's not normal; well it is normal for people, it just gets a bit mundane and boring.'* (Natasha)

The group adds something to family routine and allows everyone in the family to share in it. Even if the mums are not personally attending the group, they appear to feel the wider benefits of having something different to discuss with their children, and it gives the children something to share with the mums that goes beyond the 'mundane' as Natasha refers to it. This opportunity for new conversations extends to the dynamic between the couples, and is again viewed as a positive addition to their lives:

*'... it's good, because he is mixing with these people and having time away from home; [when] he comes back he has got something to talk about.'* (Gill)

Part of the appeal, particularly of the Saturday Club, from the women's perspectives, was that the structure and opportunity for father and child time was free from the influence of mums/women. The ability for men to have time, as dads only, with their children was seen as a major benefit and something the women identified as being of importance:

*'I mean I know it's an hour and a half or something or an hour but it's that hour ain't it with dad uninterrupted.'* (Marie)

*'You know, it's also a place for kids to go and I think its brilliant that dads get to be more involved without the responsibility of the mums.'* (Clare)



### Salford Dadz - Little Hulton

Posted by Heather Henry [?] · 1 March · 🌐

Happy first birthday #SalfordDadz Saturday dads and kids club! We celebrated one whole year of Saturday activities this week with this fantastic cake and 41- yes FORTY ONE dads and their children. Good job it was a big cake. Sent some home for the mums too!



486 people reached

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Picture: Salford Dadz Saturday Club reaches its first year milestone



*'it's nice that they've got time with dad rather than just being at home with the mum on the weekend.'* (Natasha)

There is then a benefit seen to exist for the mums in terms of this dad and children time:

*'... to have dads being you know the sole carer even for an hour a couple of hours or whatever, it allows them to prove to their partner.'* (Deb)

Others suggest that women, as parents, can be seen as wanting to be 'in charge'. The ability for men to care for, and engage with their children in a setting away from the home and free from the influence of mums is therefore significant:

*'I think a group like this gives them a little bit of independence even if the dad is there. Women are inclined to control, men obviously are controlling I think or can be, some of them can be, women are time controlling as in if someone is not doing something correct, they will just jump in and they'll do it for them because it's easier.'* (Gill)

It simultaneously allows the children an opportunity they may not otherwise get to do something specifically with their dad, and with other dads and children:

*'You know she enjoys it with her dad, spending time with her dad.'* (Laura)

*'... I think it's good for children as well as the dads and so that way the kids know that they've got a dad to go with its two parents not just the one which is the mum cos most things go to the mum then the dad, apart from the fun things that dads do but there is more to it for a dad's job than that.'* (Clare)



Picture: Saturday Club visit to Little Hulton Library March 2014

Salford Dadz then offers the structure and opportunity for fathering and 'being a dad' to be framed within different parameters, with dads being viewed by the women as equally able to take responsibility for their children and to demonstrate to their children that their role as a dad encompasses many aspects.

### Social inclusion

Salford Dadz clearly offers something different to families, and a further benefit narrated by the women is that of social inclusion.

The group is seen as promoting inclusion, and of celebrating difference and diversity, which is widely viewed as being a positive feature of the Salford Dadz group and something that the women recognise as benefitting all the family, themselves included.

The Saturday Club seems to encourage inclusion among children of different ages:

*'... it was just nice to see all the kids were playing together. There was no like singling out like even from the older ones to the younger ones, they were all involved.'* (Marie)

The mixed age group of the children who attend is then seen to be an attribute of the group and setting, and even though it has been by chance that the mix within the group has been created, i.e. based on who has chosen to attend, this diversity has been embraced:

*'I think it works better that is mixed ages because you can all bounce off each other ... they've all got different personalities so they all, yeah it works, it's like a family, it works.'* (Gill)

This inclusion is seen to spread further in terms of the children learning indirectly through the mixed nature of the Saturday Club how to accept difference and how to be more aware of other people's views, beliefs and abilities:

*'the kids like to go because they make different stuff and they've got different friends from school, so it's like communicating with different people.'* (Rachel)

*'... it does teach them that not everybody can do the same as them which is good. I think it opens up their eyes then to different situations that are around the normal situations like racism ... it teaches them to be understanding of other people's religions and beliefs which is so important nowadays and a lot of parents don't think to consider to teach them.'* (Natasha)

The men who are part of Salford Dadz are also seen to be learning to be more accepting of difference and developing the ability to be more socially inclusive within their own lives as a result of the project:

*'He has realised that there are some people out there, I know it sounds bad, but when you mix with different, some types of people you realise that their lives are a lot worse than yours. So I think he can sit back and say you know, he can thank something for what he has got because other people have got it worse ... And till he mixes with these people that are not normally in his circle he don't realise how lucky he is so I think some appreciation is involved in what goes on and it works for everyone.'* (Gill)

## Impact of the project

The project can be seen through the interviews with women as having impacts in four ways; changes to men; changes to children; changes to women; and changes within the community.

## Changes to men

The women identified changes in men as the main impact of the project. Such changes were viewed as highly significant and were directly attributed to the men's involvement in Salford Dadz. The three major changes in men could be summarised as: confidence; support; and friendship.

## Confidence



*Members of the Council of Dadz meet Andy Burnham MP at a Radio 5 live event in Manchester*

Many of the women saw major changes in their partners, former partners, family members, or friends who attend Salford Dadz with growth in confidence being one of the most important changes that the project had engendered for the men. When asked about the type of changes in her partner, one woman replied: *'Positive, his confidence has grown.'* (Gill).

Some of the women identified how the men were previously fairly withdrawn and quiet, and that the project has opened things up for them:

*'Well he was very quiet, he would hardly go out ... It's helped [his] confidence. He is more confident now and he likes the fact that he is in contact with other dads.'* (Natasha)

*'I know I'm not with him but it's good to see him communicating with different people 'cause he was quiet and he wouldn't go out.'* (Rachel)

Even among their former partners, women were identifying positive changes as a result of the project:



*'He is a lot more confident, very chatty' (Clare) and that this had spillover into their fathering interactions within other arenas, for example when taking their daughter to other activities, she noted that 'my ex he was helping them all out more. They were talking to him as well ...Yeah, the other mums were talking to him, they found him more approachable I guess'.*

The confidence that the men have developed has enabled them to engage with other parents, and this has facilitated them in being able to do more, including offering support to others:

*'he is more confident. I just realised and he is quite happy to you know go out of his way to help other dads especially new dads that come along.'* (Natasha)

Some of the women discussed how Salford Dadz has been a positive tool for helping men to address the mental health issues and concerns they had been experiencing and how this led on to further positive change. In this regard, the extent of the change was seen by some as quite extensive:

*'In respect to [him], the change in him is just I don't know what to call it, it's just like ... it's a miracle ... I think it's changed his life.'* (Marie)

Even those women more on the periphery of the group identified growth in confidence as a result of the Salford Dadz project and how this then increased in the men's belief in their ability to achieve things:

*'And I think those men who didn't have the confidence really to believe they could put an event on or be part of that, just to see their confidence grow and you know to get as a group, it means things can happen.'* (Deb)



✨ **Heather Henry** ✨ @HeatherHenry4 · Dec 14

So proud of #salforddadz debut in #London discussing how fathers heal themselves [gehealthcarefinnamore.com/insight/emergi...](https://www.gehealthcarefinnamore.com/insight/emergi...)



Picture: Members of Salford Dadz at NHS Alliance annual conference in London telling their stories

## Support

This growing confidence, and the changes that followed, could be linked to the support that Salford Dadz is seen to provide. The women talked about the support aspect of the project extensively, demonstrating recognition of the importance of this aspect. Some identified how Salford Dadz was a multi-faceted project; that is, it is not just about the Saturday Club, but has other dimensions woven within the structure of the project:

*'I think that's quite amazing really. Because obviously people have had issues in their lives and they have stuck with that through their issue and it has become like something to centre themselves with I suppose. It's like a counselling place for counselling each other, as well as a counselling place dealing with the project ... it's not just about going to play with your kids on Saturdays; it's got more layers than that.'* (Deb)

*'I think it's good for them, cos they know, yes they are with the kids but they [are] out of the house not stuck at home. They get to go and have a chat with other blokes who are around their age and maybe some of the dads are a bit older and they think 'I've had a bad experience with such a body today they've done this I don't know how to deal with it' and they can get advice off the other dads.'* (Natasha)

The support that the men access via Salford Dadz is seen as unique and very much something that would be otherwise lacking from the lives of these men. When the men are facing difficult challenges the project is seen as being vital; for example, when discussing one of the fathers in the group experiencing very challenging personal circumstances, Marie states:

*'I know they were all supporting each other, ringing, asking how he was ... I think it's part of feeling belonged and wanted.'* (Marie)

The importance of this support infrastructure was often stated in strong terms:

*'... these men have a great support network and I think it's just invaluable.'* (Deb)

This network of support is seen by the women as allowing the men to share aspects of their lives that they otherwise wouldn't have an outlet for sharing:

*'... he's got people to talk to and to bounce off which is important. He is just happier in himself, he is just, he will come home and he is happier and he's got people you know. I think having that people to rely on, if he has got a problem he can talk to them and ultimately if they've got a problem they will talk to him um ... I just, yeah, I just think it's nice.'* (Gill)

*'... the dads can sort of like open up more without the mums being there. I suppose with certain males, some will open up and some will just toughen up.'* (Laura)

The context of the group is conducive to developing support as it provides the virtual and metaphorical space for men to come together:

*'... the dads get chance to relax which is nice cos they don't get much chance to socialise if they are at work all week, even if they are not working they are still looking for jobs so when it gets to the weekend it gives them spaces.'* (Natasha)

This space then facilitates men engaging with each other in ways that some women recognise may not have been the 'norm' for them:

*'Oh my god, it's amazing ... it was just very quiet low conversation because there are personal matters they are discussing as opposed to blokes in a pub ... There is no bravado with them.'* (Deb)

This space is also free from the influence of women which, like the opportunity for dads and children to be together on a Saturday without the mums, gives that male only space in which the men can support each other as dads and as men:

*'I think that's important as well, that you are safe, confidential. There's stuff that's going to be talked about ... I think it's important that it is kept away from the women and it's not discussed and if the women have a problem with that then that's their insecurities to deal with.'* (Gill)

### **Friendship**

The support that the men receive has led to the development of important friendships among the men that now extend beyond the confines of the group setting. The women identify these friendships as being valuable and important, and contextualise them as friends that the men may not have had opportunity to make without Salford Dadz:

*'He has made a lot of friends which is good ... like he has more friends who are dads.'* (Natasha)

The friendships forged are spoken about in terms of being significant social relationships:

Interviewer: *'But he has made other friends as a result of the project?'*

Participant: *'Yeah and some good ones as well'*

*'Yes, he has many to call friends, because before the dads group he only had one or two friends ... And he has met a lot of friends within the dads group.'* (Laura)

The group is then seen as way of the men having more meaningful friendships within their lives, and the women articulate this in their reflections on the project:

*'I think it's part of feeling belonged and wanted, do you understand what I mean? Cos there are probably some of them they do struggle to make friends and they've got a little group of friends now.'* (Marie)

*'... he speaks to them outside of the group ... he goes oh I'll go and play some pool with my group whoever, so he goes to that as well so I get TueSalford Dadzay afternoon peace as well ... he gets time to just be [himself] with other dads. And they ... you know they can have a bit of time where they are just themselves again.'* (Natasha)

## Impact on children

The women overwhelmingly talked about the enjoyment their children have of the Saturday Club, 'my kids love it' (Clare), and how the enjoyment of the activities there is dual; that is, both the dads and the children reap the benefits of the project:

*'I think it's important to kids that they enjoy it ... As well as the dads, it is good for the dads.'*  
(Natasha)

*'... it's just had a massive impact on his life and his kids' life.'* (Marie)

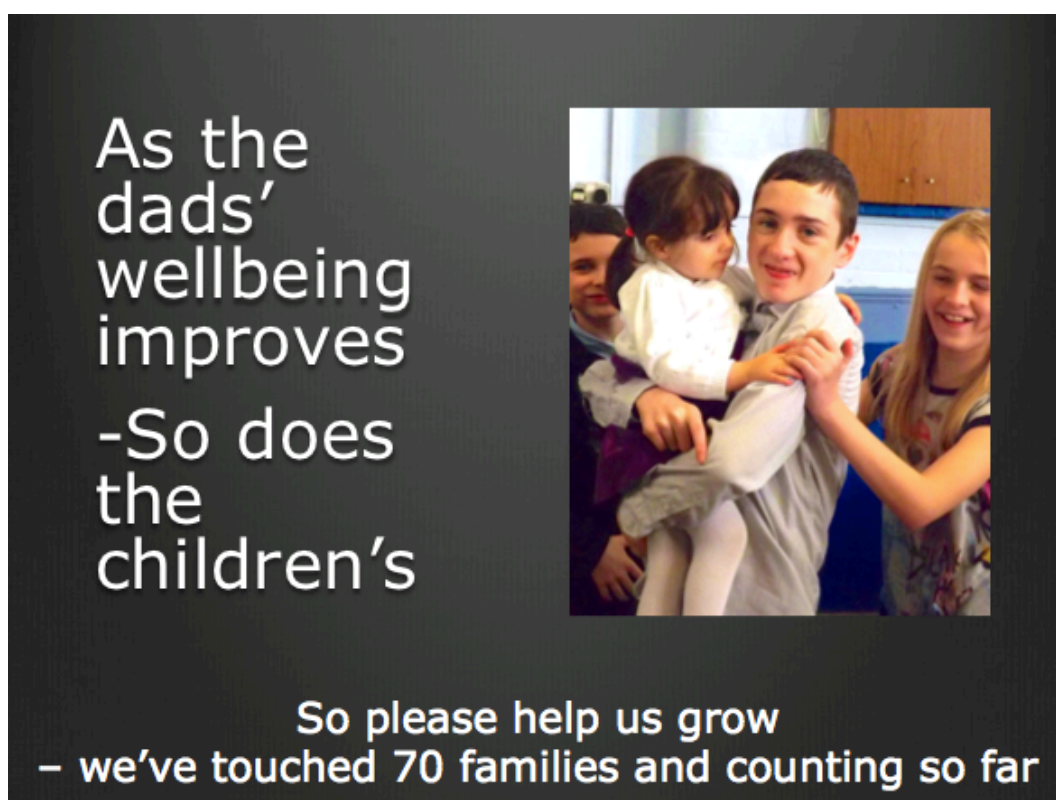
The impact of the project in terms of father and child relationships was also visible to the mums in terms of changes in their children's attitudes and actions. Speaking about her son, one mum relates how:

*'I think it's helped him build a better relationship with [his dad] ... they do things together more now ... if there is a problem he will turn to [his dad]. I don't even get mithered any more.'* (Natasha)

This links to what the dads were saying in the earlier section about how their involvement alleviates some of the childcare burden that the women experience.

The women noted that the increased confidence seen in the men (discussed earlier), was also seen to have occurred for the children too:

*'... my son has got more confident ... so he is a lot more confident now when mixing with other children of different ages.'* (Gill)



Picture: Salford Dads Facebook profile picture taken at Saturday Club

The children, by attending Salford Dadz with their fathers, were seen to be getting exposure to men as dads in very positive ways, through improved types of role modelling:

*'It has helped them out really cos he is now showing the kids how to be a man, really how to grow up knowing ... and they know that if there is a problem they can speak to him, they know they don't have to go out to the pub or sit around the house watching telly all day.'* (Natasha)

Some mothers also noted that there is educational value to the Saturday Club and attributed development in their children to the activities they were being exposed to via the Saturday Club:

*'He has been learning while he has been here as well 'cause I don't know if they've got a colour book or they paint or but he has been coming home and saying, that's five, you know different numbers as well as painting, so that's a positive thing as well.'* (Rachel)

### **Impact on women**

Some of the women identified how the project directly or indirectly influenced them in terms of changing their actions, or ways of thinking, or offering new directions. For some, the group helped change how they view men, which could be a major shift in terms of experiences and thinking:

*'... it's changed my thoughts on men which was key for me ... and a lot of women probably get this. You know if you see a group of men who support each other, who are mature and responsible and if that hasn't been part of your life growing up, when you meet a man who seems to have those qualities you assume it's like a one off thing ... everybody should experience seeing a group of men acting in this responsible, mature, supportive way. Particularly women like myself who have not seen that growing up.'* (Deb)

Other women identified the potential positive impact that the group may have on changing wider perceptions of men within their community:

*'I think it gives the men more independence as well cos we grow up thinking men are useless, you know, because like we used to think they just, all they are about is sitting watching football, but now it's totally different I think ... a couple of dads have a bad reputation, they've all of them have a bad reputation in a lot of like women's eyes. But now you just take a look at all these dads and they are more approachable and they are not like all those dads we used to hear about.'* (Clare)

The Salford Dadz group then has the potential to change perceptions and help people to view men in a positive light. This is important as taking a positive approach to engaging men has been shown to be a crucial part of successful health work with men (Robertson et al., 2015).

For other women, the project had changed their views, not about men, but in a wider context. For example, one woman felt that because her partner was now mixing in a more inclusive and wider social group that it had actually created more tolerance for her about other people:

*'I've become more tolerant to people ... the tolerance side has changed in me I think. A lot better than it was, again mixing with different people.'* (Gill)

Such changes are potentially very beneficial for community cohesion.

For another woman, she identified how her life was taking different directions due to coming into contact with the staff working on the project:

*'I think it's the boss ... is helping to open up a baby massage ... Yeah and do my own groups and lessons for mums and basically the dads.'* (Claire)

When asked if she would have been doing that without the wider context of Salford Dadz, Claire said that without the project she would not be following this path.

On a more pragmatic level, a number of mums commented that the Saturday Club gave them some time and space for themselves which they would not have got otherwise. This was represented as a good opportunity for them to 'be themselves' rather than 'someone's mum' and the group was therefore seen as a 'win-win', the dads and the children enjoying time together and the mums enjoying time to themselves:

*'that gives me time to myself as well, so I get a bit of my time, no kids, so I can do what I want ... just be my rather than mum which is nice cos then it's like you can have a bath without 'mum, I need this mum, I need you to do that' ... even in that hour it's so important that you've got time when I'm just me, I don't have to worry about anyone else.'* (Natasha)

*'I think it gives the mums a break as well to be honest cos you don't really get a break really as such cos you are always like mum.'* (Marie)

*'So it gives me time to chill ... Yeah it gives me five minutes on my own. I love my kids to bits but ...'* (Rachel)

Whilst some women discussed the impact of the project indirectly in terms of their relationships with the men (for example, in terms of having more to talk to one another about at home, etc.), some were more direct about the relationship impact:

*'Oh we talk a lot more now ... Yeah a lot more, we talk more. In a way we are doing it for the kids, but before he'd come in and be like hi, but now it's like, did you like it today and we are communicating more. So it's one good thing as well' ... Considering we couldn't stand each other then, now let's all be friends. So good.'* (Rachel)

Salford Dadz then can generate changes in women's perceptions of men but also provides them with personal time, which many identify as being much needed in the context of parenting young children. It can also enable them to think opportunities for following new directions in their own lives.

### **Impact on the community**

Changes on a personal level, for themselves, the men and their children, are therefore evident to the women. However, some women also identified how Salford Dadz was having an impact at a community level. The project is seen as having 'respect' within the community and having appeal to this wider community:

*'I think just It looks like something you would want to be a part of, the females wanted that group for themselves!'* (Deb)



There was a feeling that Salford Dadz plays a role in generating 'healthy families' within the local community:

*'I think men understand men easier and they go yeah I know what you mean. Whereas if there's nobody to talk to what else can they do? But you know, it will like build up until they cause a fight or they go drinking and try drowning their sorrows, doesn't make it any better, it kinda hides it from yourself for a bit so it is a good way of keeping healthy relationships with your family and keep your families together so it is good that they've got somewhere to go, something to do.'* (Natasha)

However, some evaluated the wider community impact of Salford Dadz as being modest, due to the limited size of the group;

*'I don't think it has hit the community much has it? I mean we have got a small group attending.'* (Gill)

### **Areas for improvement**

Whilst the interviews with the women predominantly demonstrated positivity and support for the project, the women also identified areas they felt could be improved, or developed, to strengthen Salford Dadz.

### **Organisation**

Organisation was raised across a number of the interviews, with the women suggesting the men could be more organised in relation to some aspects of Salford Dadz's activity. This more organised or planned approach was seen to have benefits and positive outcomes for the group both now and in the future. Some discussion was about the activities on a Saturday, suggesting the need for a stronger plan in order not to create disappointment for the children:

*'They could have been more organised but that's a male thing, I think, because it's run by mainly men. They are not that greatly organised so they could be a little bit more organised as far as the children are concerned ... and not necessarily tell the children what's gonna happen so when it doesn't happen then there is no disappointment involved.'* (Gill)

Planning, as a tool for ensuring a good outcome at the sessions, was also seen as important for the women. Suggestions for managing the preparation before the children arrive were suggested, such as setting up the room the night before, or coming in earlier to be able to be ready:

*'... just setting things up earlier, before ... Yeah think ahead, plan things out more, you know set things out so that when the kids arrive ... thinking about those things rather than hoping it's all going to magically work itself out in the last few minutes.'* (Laura)

The notion of planning also links to the location and setting of the group on a Saturday, with some women suggesting the choice of space needs greater consideration:

*'I think it could be a little more planned as in having the same location but unfortunately they can't do that, because that causes problems with people especially if they are out of this main area and they are coming into the area, they might not necessarily know where it is*

*and what they are doing and what time it is, so I think a scheduled set time, set place in an ideal world.'* (Gill)

*'I think if they had a meeting plan I don't know if they, I think that sort, is that going to change or you know they are not completely sure where they are going to have you know the consistency of where things are happening ... and giving it sort of permanency.'* (Deb)

*'I would say no problems about the group because obviously it's all good, I just think they need a little room to do more stuff in, because they've got the reception there's not much to do and when they go to the church they have a little room so they need more stuff like.'* (Rachel)

Some of the women talked about the men needing to own the group more, seeing it as important in terms of planning for the future and how the men need to *'look after the group themselves'* (Natasha). Being able to do this was seen as requiring team work from the men; something some women also saw as an area for further improvement:

*'I think some of the dads probably take liberties and kind of take advantage of those that do want to help each other and they'll kind of like go, yeah well I'll come to this but only if I can get that. They are not willing to do the leg work when they are doing the fundraising and things like that and track and everything. I don't want to do that but I want to come to group and get this.'* (Natasha)

### **Reaching out**

A further area some women identified as requiring improvement for Salford Dadz was drawing in other people. Doing this was seen as something that would allow the group to build and develop and also help inclusivity and avoid some feeling marginalised by the group. Specifically, some women who may feel *'pushed out'* by the group could be drawn in, which would help with perceptions of the group and its purpose:

*'I can't think of other ways they can improve other than if there is some, if there is a way when women feel alienated ... something they came on board with the projects that every now and again we do with this one, it's a family including partners and maybe if they did that they would find their own links and support one another or something ... but it's about the dads isn't it? It's dads club, it's about the dads but obviously everybody in the family suppose supports one another, don't they? So everybody feels under the umbrella.'* (Deb)

*'It's just a shame they can't reach more people ... You know like when they do these fun days, it wasn't stipulated who could go. So I think they could say like it's a family day ... not just a Salford Dadz day, do you understand? It just needs to be more obvious who it's for ... I think had it been made aware it was a family day ... I think the turnout would have been massive.'* (Marie)

Others identify that reaching out could include other groups:

*'I'll tell you what there isn't, there aren't any gay dads. I don't know if that's just a coincidence that they haven't targeted that side, but we don't seem to have any of them ... I don't know why that is, I mean gay dads have children don't they?'* (Gill)



There were pragmatic suggestions about reaching out to other people in the community which links to be features of the community itself in terms of the material resources that people may not possess:

*'we've got the big banner on the front of the church but I think we need little leaflets ... most people haven't got computers ... Yeah, well people without having any money, the kids can come in it's all free. So if you can have leaflets I would do.'* (Rachel)

The women therefore see the potential for greater inclusion to be achieved and would like to see 'reaching out' to others as part of the improvements Salford Dadz could make going forwards. As one mum suggests, *'just spread the word and people will come.'* (Rachel).

### Summary

The interviews captured a range of views from different women: those who were 'fans' of the project; those whose partners and former partners who are involved in Salford Dadz; those who could be perceived as more sceptical. The overwhelming sense from the data was of the positive impact and the positive benefits the women felt Salford Dadz brought, and this extended across different levels; the individual, the family, as well as (in a more limited way) to the community itself. That Salford Dadz is a project which is free to attend, allowing men to spend time with their children without the gaze of 'mums' was viewed as highly positive for all concerned. Men were seen as being able to father within a safe context (one mum even commented of the Saturday Club that *'I know they are safe'* (Rachel)), and to grow and develop the support and friendship of other men. These were seen as experiences that would otherwise not have existed within the community of Little Hulton without the Salford Dadz project. Salford Dadz was seen as providing fertile ground in which men, and their families could grow their social networks and that this experience was a good way of exposing families to the diversity of people and families that exist within their community. It was suggested that many of the people involved would not have come together without the Salford Dadz project.

The women identified positive changes in the men they were connected to as a result of the project, and some were keen for the magnitude of these changes to be noted. The children were widely seen to enjoy and benefit from the Saturday Club and were perceived as having grown and developed as a result of their attendance at the project with their dads. Despite the women not directly attending the project (except for family days/events), some attributed changes in themselves as being due to the impact of Salford Dadz; thus the impact of Salford Dadz could be seen as demonstrating a ripple effect in terms of filtering out and into community.

In the position of 'looking in' to the project, the women were able to express and identify areas that the men could work on to improve the project. Many were keen to express that there was nothing fundamental in terms of the premise of the project that needed attention or improvement, but that if the project adopted further strategies around organisation and reaching out (greater inclusion) this would have benefits for going forwards. Clare perhaps best encapsulates the overall impression of the project from the perspective of women:

*'No I think it's all positive. I don't really see any negatives for the dads at all ... I think it should be a worldwide thing, not maybe not the Salford Dadz but a dads thing in other areas ... cos it's not just the Little Hulton dads that need support.'* (Clare).

## Children and young people's perspectives

### What is the nature of the impacts on children and young people of their father's engagement in the project?

There was considerable agreement among the children about the impacts of their fathers being part of Salford Dadz. The older ones were able to express deeper insights, sometimes with remarkable clarity and analysis.

#### Spending more time together

*"Before, I didn't spend much time with my dad. I just stayed in the house not really doing anything. Now I spend more time with my dad, and it's special time just for me. But we both like spending time together."* (Video)

*"I made lots and lots of friends, and before I went to Salford Dadz I was stuck in the house all day and it was boring."* (Postcard)

*"It's for boys and girls...there is quite a few girls that normally come. We come every week. It's something to do on a Saturday, and when you're not doing it you're bored."* (Small group discussion)



*"It's something to do on a Saturday morning. Gets us out the house. I like spending time with my dad. He's the sort of dad I always dreamed of having and now I don't need to dream any more. If I wasn't here I'd be in bed."* (Informal discussion)

*"I spend lots of time with my dad, and I have made lots of friends. I look forward to spending time with my dad."* (Postcard)

*"I stay up with my dad instead of going to bed. My mum goes to bed early, but I stay up with my dad."* (Small group discussion)

These contributions were typical of the thoughts of many of the children. For fathers and children to spend time together had been unusual, but this arrangement had normalised. It seemed important to the children to emphasise that both fathers and children enjoyed the new relationship. Sometimes the change was particularly necessary but all the more significant for the wider impact that was seen.

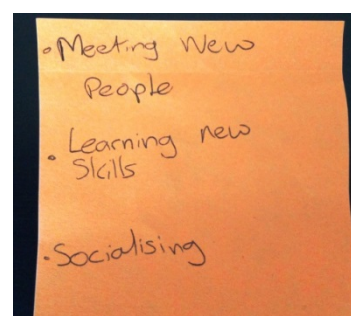
*"Something changed between us. We weren't good together before. Our relationship is better now. We spend more time together; do more things together. It's the same at home and when we go out, too. It wasn't so good before."* (Video)

*"Dad shouted at us a lot before, but not now."* (Video)

The change in behaviour was not one-sided. Children recognised that they had changed, too, partly on coming to understand their father's issues as well as their own responses.

*"I act differently, too. He is interested in me, so we talk together more."* (Video)

*"It changes people. My brothers, they're not as aggressive or mean. They want to do something different like draw a picture, as you can*



*express yourself by drawing a picture. it really helps them. It means a difference for my mum and dad because they're not being silly or aggressive. It makes their life easier. It makes my life easier, too. They (mum and dad) can plan things knowing it's not going to be spoiled."* (Small group discussion)

### **Making friends, having fun and being happy**

Meeting new friends was an integral part of being together. Most children spoke of making new friends within the group but also then of making new friends at school when this had not been the case previously. This was attributed to the skills, confidence and attitudinal changes gained from Salford Dadz.

*"My dad meeting new people: that was important, too."* (Video)

*"My dad is a lot happier when he comes to Salford Dadz."* (Postcard)

*"It's a way to stay out of trouble. There are friends to meet and fun things to do. There is time to talk to people and generally just have fun."* (Interview)

*"I spend lots of time with my dad, and I have made lots of friends."* (Postcard)

*"I've been getting a lot more friends at school, too."* (Video)

I think that things got better because... *"now I see children and dads happy. I feel elated now that I go to Salford Dadz."* (Postcard)

Salford Dadz made things better for me because... *"they do some activities and they do puppet shows. Because it is exciting. They do fun stuff."* (Postcard)

From the post-it notes activity it became clear that, while enjoying Saturday Club activities tremendously, most children placed greater value on social aspects of the provision: new friendships, developing and maintaining a network of adults and children, and experiencing the camaraderie and support of the group. "Being with my dad", "Teamwork", and "Socialising with other children" were voted the top three issues out of the twelve that were raised.

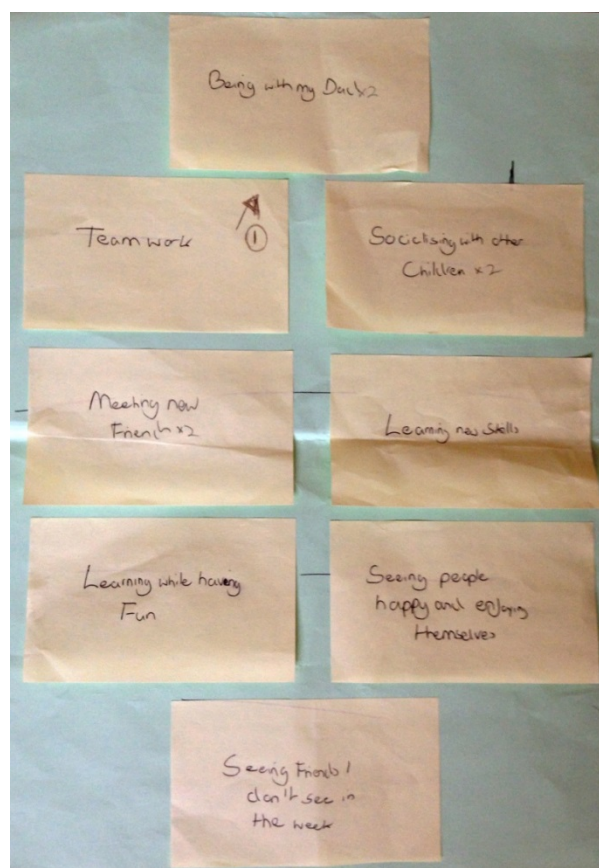
### **Finding new respect for fathers and accepting responsibility**

Children had found new respect for their fathers for what they had achieved and how they had worked to make a difference not only to their own family but to others, too.

*"It's not really changed my dad, he was always a fun dad anyway and he knows lots of people. I reckon he's helped a lot of other dads."* (Video)

*"He shares his art with other people as well. I think it's good that he helps other people."* (Interview)

Some of the older children recounted how they had learned to accept responsibility – a significant change in their own outlook, and they had taken on some of the work of running the club. Indeed, this was evidenced at the event when the participants took to encouraging others to engage in



different activities, to interview others, and to help with cleaning the painting materials used on the video-recording enclosure.

Many strategies had been adopted by fathers to interact with their children more positively and effectively. One example was typical of this. One participant had experienced problems with anger which often led to bad behaviour and lying to cover his guilt. As part of an alternative way to manage the situation he had agreed with his father that they would use a code word if he or his father thought that he was lying. This had been particularly helpful. He thought that he was far less angry since going the Saturday Club. (Small group discussion)

### Legacy effects

Several children spoke of differences in home life as result of Salford Dadz. As well as helping their father, children also explained about the impact on their mothers of their own changed attitude.

*"Things have changed at home, too. I feel like doing the things that we do here at home as well. I spend more time at home with him, too."* (Video)

*"I don't just spend more time with my dad here, we spend more time together at home, too."* (Video)

*"Now I help my relatives (such as my dad, my uncle and my grandad)."* (Postcard)

*"When my mum is ill, we are happy to help out at home with looking after [sibling] and helping with jobs round the house."* (Video)

Changes at home were stated explicitly to be an extension of the impact of Salford Dadz. An effect of the role-modelling offered by their fathers was that children mirrored the positive attitude seen in their fathers. They spoke of a more cooperative home and a community spirit.



*"Because things are better now, we do the washing-up at home and stuff like that."* (Interview)

*"We help each other and so we are able to help other people, too."* (Video)

Fundamental changes were reported in the attitude, skills and behaviour of the children whose fathers were engaged with Salford Dadz. They had come to appreciate the needs of others and to have the skills to gain the trust of new members, interacting in an encouraging, supportive manner, coaching and mentoring both children and fathers. The impact of engagement with Salford Dadz was such that they foresaw sustained involvement through generations..

*"I don't want to be staying in bed till 1 or 2 o'clock. My friends stay in bed for half the day: they're not getting anything done. When I grow up and have kids of my own I'll bring them to Salford dads. I know what my dad's done for me. Everything he's done for me I can pass on to my kids. Some kids don't get this. Some kids are in really bad neighbourhoods where they don't get anything like this."* (Small group discussion)



## In what context did these impacts occur?

### Infectious enthusiasm

The commitment to Salford Dadz was palpable among the fathers who had brought their children to the event, and this was mirrored in their children. Key messages had been internalised such that one young man explained the process of growing the group membership as being *“like ripples in a puddle when a stone is dropped in”* (interview). In all of the activities, children were enthusiastic about what had been achieved, how others could benefit in a similar manner, and the need to continue in the same direction.

*“I’ve told a lot of people. I do bag packs to fundraise, and a lot of dads ask what it’s all about. We say ‘you should come along’ and they do actually come along. Anyone can come. Even if you just heard about it you can come along.”* (Small group discussion)

### Learning to trust in an enabling environment

Children spoke of coming to trust their father, both in his feelings for them and his behaviour towards them. At the same time, they realised that they were gaining his trust in return.

*“There’s a massive difference now. I trust my dad more and I like to spend time with him now.”* (Video)

In a small group discussion, one boy explained how he respected his father more because of Salford Dadz. They trusted each other more and understood each other more. He explained that he felt safe around his parents because he knew that he could trust them.

Some of the children were acutely aware of the plight of others who were unable to have such persistent (or sometimes any) contact with their fathers following the break-up of a marriage. They recognised Salford Dadz as a facility to offer safe contact and structured time together.

*“The Saturday Club is a way for mothers to let children see their dads when they didn’t see them before. Not all children get to see their dads.”* (Video)

*“It happened because all parents get to see their children – even when they have broken up. I’m happy that I came to Salford Dadz.”* (Video)

*“Fathers of other children treat step-children as their own. [They just see us all as the same.]”* (Interview)

*“It’s really good spending time with my brothers and my Dad. I’ve got to meet a new friend too. My dad’s not really any different since he’s been with the Salford Dadz. Another thing is that we get to decide what we’re going to do, that’s better than other groups I’ve been to. We get to do lots of fun things because the dads are like big kids, too, really.”* (Informal discussion)

The Salford Dadz initiative had led to a physical and psychological space in which children could find someone to talk over problems and offer advice. This was not necessarily their own father.

### Mutual recognition of improved happiness

Several children reported that both they and their fathers were happier

*“It has helped me to bond with my dad. It is working. Most stuff is with mums, like shopping and days out, but with your dad you can do more men’s stuff. More games to play.”* (Interview)

*“I think groups like this help you bond with your dad and mum. Groups like this really do help.”* (Small group discussion)

*“Dad realised how much happier I was after he started Salford Dadz.”* (Video)

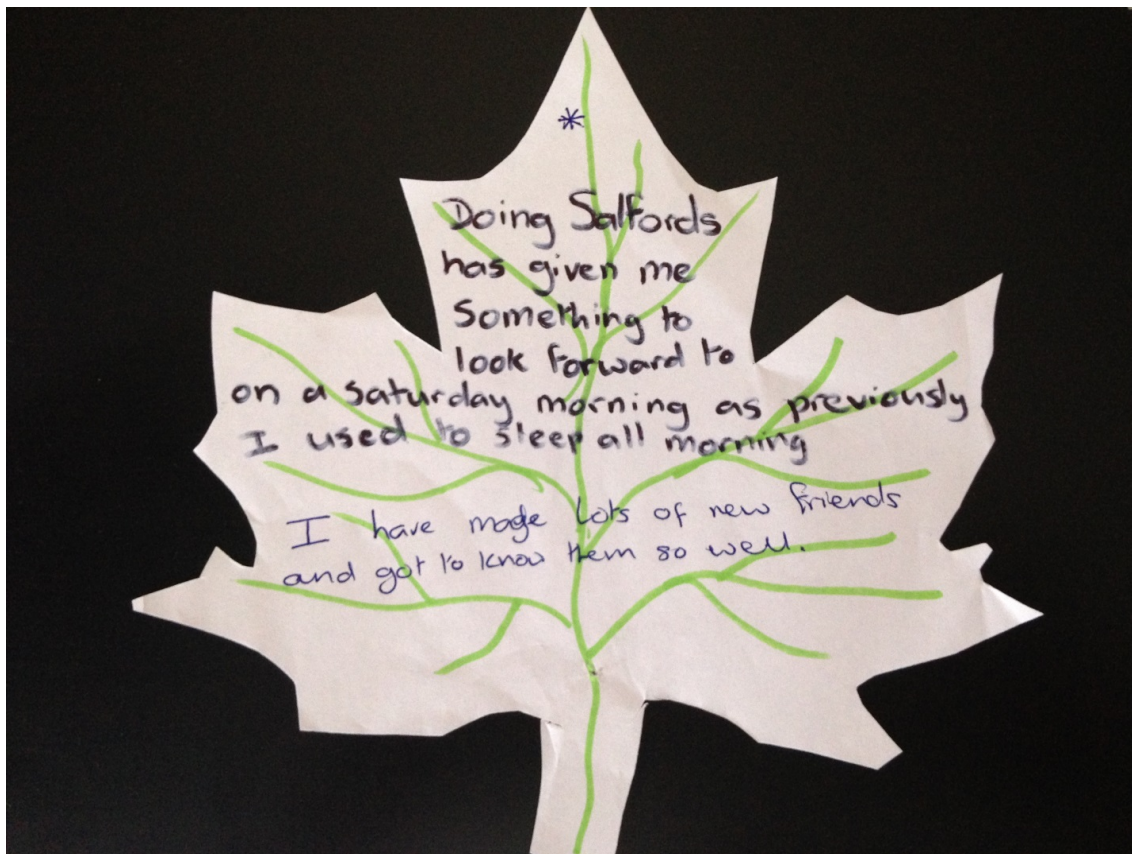
There was pride in achievements made with their fathers, as exemplified by two brothers.

*"We have fayres and things like that. When they had an open day we had a stall. We did that (pointing to plants outside in border on top of wall). We planted all those, and we did the plants and borders near the slide."*

They were proud of this work and explained that they had done this with their fathers. They explained that also engaged in crafts like card-making which helped one brother to see that it was not necessary to play on the X-Box all day.

### **A giant family**

There was a distinct belief, which was borne out by observation, that improvement in the individual relationship between each father and their children was not the limit of the impact. All the fathers befriended all of the children, who reciprocated by making friends with the other fathers. As one participant said: *"We are like a giant family"*.



*"It's not just me and my dad. All the other dads and children make it work."* (Video)

*Dads get to know other dads more and the kids get to know the other dads. We all make new friends."* (Video)

*"All of the dads are friends to all of the kids. They look out for them."* (Interview)

This helped with the process of learning to trust other people more. In individual interviews, different "types" of fathers were identified: arts and crafts dads, those with different hobbies, and those who were good at organising different activities. This meant that these skills could be brought to bear to match the variety of needs and preferences of the children.

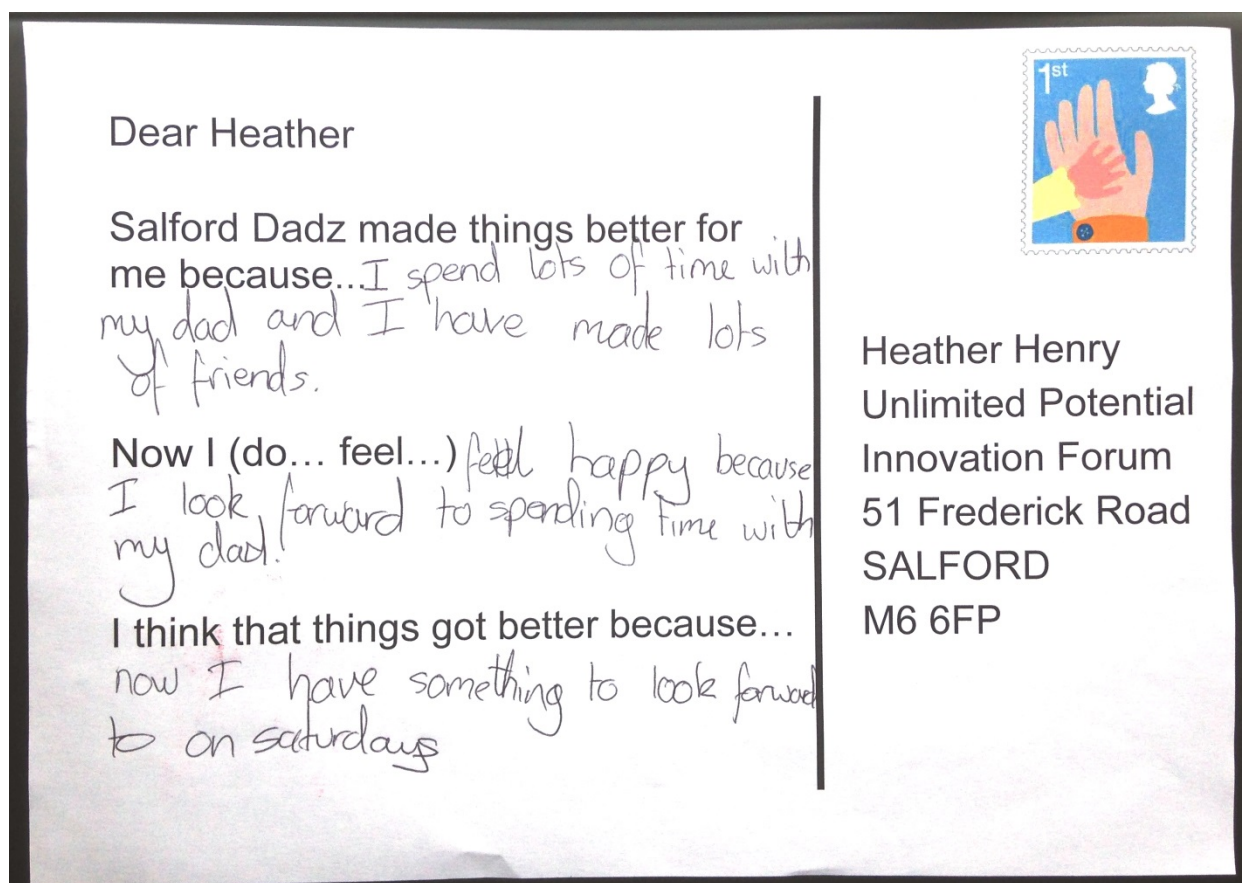
## What were the mechanisms that led to the impact coming about?

### **Structure, stability and certainty**

Not surprisingly, it was difficult for children to express their thoughts on this part of the evaluation yet their contributions yielded the required clues as to how the impacts had been brought about. A considerable part of the data could be seen to relate to the essential role of structure and stability in the Salford Dadz organisation.

Children spoke with confidence of the regularity and certainty associated with the Saturday Club. Such stability was welcomed and served to allow children to believe in the longevity of the changes that had been seen in their fathers. Many spoke of looking forward to this and other events, secure in the knowledge that they would not be disappointed.

*"I've got something to do with my dad. Definitely [emphasised], we will do something." (Video)*



Another part of the structure and stability was having external support but support which was not intrusive or interfering. A feeling of corporate competence and independence was expressed. There were only two unprompted references to such support, with all other contributions focussed entirely on the internal effort.

As part of the security offered by stability and structure, a number of the children reported feeling safe at Salford Dadz.

*"I trust my dad more. I feel safer." (Video)*

Salford Dadz made things better for me because... *"It makes me feel safe, happy and excited."* (Postcard)

Some children were able to gauge the time that was needed for the changes to be seen, encouraging others to recognise this and to persist with engagement. The regularity of the events programme and stability of the approach by Council of Dads were noted to be contributing factors.

*"It was maybe two weeks before I noticed the change."* (Video)

*"After about three weeks I got to know more people and the improvement in my dad was really noticeable."* (Video)

Children acknowledged that ensuring that the time spent with their father was fun was a function of the focus that the Salford Dadz held.

*"It's a special happy time for dads and children. The dads make sure that the children are happy. All sizes and ages of children."* (Video)

### **Active involvement and empowerment**

The way that the Saturday Club was organised by Salford Dadz meetings was identified as one of the vital factors in ensuring that children were actively involved in decision-making. The children appreciated the opportunity to be involved and to exert influence over what would be done.

*"Dads take the lead but they ask the kids what they want to do, and they listen to us, too."* (Interview)

*"They take everyone's ideas and fit them all in."* (Interview)

*"I think and talk a lot about the club at home. I give ideas and the ideas are used."* (Interview)

*"Dads ask the kids for ideas, so we get to say what we want to do."* (Video)

Not only had the relationship between fathers and children changed, but the children were proud of this and no longer felt embarrassed about their visible closeness to their fathers.

*"I enjoy having family days out whereas my friends - they're embarrassed. We spend a lot of time together anyway, going to the park or going to the gym. I'm not ashamed to be seen out with Dad, whereas my friends are embarrassed. They don't like this."* (Small group discussion)

Looking forward to the next few years, one participant replied *"Hopefully it will have spread. It won't just be in Little Hulton. It will be further than that, and there will be more people coming."* (Small group discussion)

## **Summary**

### **What were the impacts?**

The clearest impact on children of Salford Dadz was simply spending more time with their father. This time was precious, novel for many, and enriching. The activities of the Saturday Club were enjoyed and valued, but making friends (with both children and adults) and the opportunity to socialise in a safe environment were valued even more. Through the programme of activities, which served as much as a vehicle to other benefits as an end in itself, children discovered a different perspective on their father, establishing a new level of mutual respect and shared happiness. This improved quality of life was extended beyond the activities of the Saturday Club to life at home.



Aspects of a lasting legacy were identified. The children recognised that their own behaviour had changed in response to their father's improved parenting approach and skills, and they had developed an interest in helping others, too. They were active in recruiting more members and in mentoring them once they had joined. Life skills gained through Salford Dadz such as the ability to express thoughts coherently were evidenced in the event.

#### **What was the context?**

These effects were experienced in the context of shared enthusiasm about the initiative together with understanding of the core purpose and values of Salford Dadz. The enabling environment of Salford Dadz had led to children trusting their father more, feeling safe, and being willing to engage with others more confidently. The recognition by children and fathers of the impact on each other's happiness was a stimulating backdrop to their ongoing endeavours. The creation and support of a community of local fathers and children provided a milieu in which the project was nurtured and developed. It provided strength, security and stability.



#### **What were the essential mechanisms?**

The structure and stability which was central to Salford Dadz was the key mechanism that brought about the impacts. Feelings of safety were an important facet of this, together with the reassurance of certainty and predictability in the programme of activities and ways of working that were maintained by the Council of Dads. This was complemented by the active involvement of children in the planning and propagation of the initiative, through which the children felt valued and empowered. In return, they demonstrated lasting commitment to the whole endeavour.

## Synthesis

### Introduction

This document provides analysis of evidence gathered for the year two evaluation of the Salford Dadz work in Little Hulton. The key points highlighted have emerged from analysis of four datasets: documentary evidence (notes from meetings, monthly progress reports, reflective diaries etc.); interviews conducted with the Salford Dadz (completed by Unlimited potential); interviews conducted by Leeds Beckett University with women from within the Little Hulton community; interactive data collection from the children and young people.

### Emergent Issues

#### 'Emotional openness'

Issues of 'emotional openness' have been brought up in numerous ways across the datasets. The fathers themselves talked about the problems that the lack of emotional relationships with their own fathers has caused (some also spoke of positive experiences they wanted to emulate) and about the incredibly significant role of 'Salford Dadz' in creating a safe space for them to feel free to share personal concerns (much of this was also reported in the evaluation of year one). Furthermore, they recognised the need for emotional sensitivity in meeting their children's needs.

The women interviewed mainly talked about this in a slightly different way, often highlighting the benefits of specifically male company for the men and recognising the opportunity this created for sharing advice and experience. However, some did directly recognise that this involved the work having a psychological (emotional) element.

The children and young people also recognised positive changes in their dads that included their ability to be more emotionally expressive and this led to significant improvements in the quality of the time they spent together.

For those establishing the work (Unlimited Potential), this issue was well recognised and the question raised (and remains) about whether 'emotional openness' is, in and of itself, a positive deviance behaviour. This seems a very important question to keep in mind given that being emotionally restricted has been linked with less mental health help-seeking (Hammer & Vogel, 2010) and as a risk factor in suicide for men (Galligan et al., 2010).

The creation of a safe space for practical and emotional sharing (alongside the fun and physical enjoyment of many activities and time with their children) generated a strong bond amongst the men which provided feelings of belonging and of being valued (and of caring for and helping others).

Given how being unable to be emotionally open is associated with the negative mental health impacts mentioned above, the ability of Salford Dadz to create such safe space to facilitate open discussion is a very significant contribution of the work. It is not only directly beneficial to the men themselves but through its impact on relationships it also benefits the women and children within the community.

#### Offering alternatives

The complex challenges faced by individual fathers (alcohol, drugs, gambling), families (separation, violence) and the wider community of Little Hulton (social and economic challenges, poverty,

unemployment) are still acutely present. Men, and specifically men within areas of deprivation, are known to show more 'maladaptive coping' mechanisms (drink, drugs, violence and even suicide – DoH, 2008, pg. 46), especially during times of stress or emotional anxiety. The interviews with those dads involved in the project showed that many of them had previously used such negative coping mechanisms and had also often felt isolated and left dealing with problems alone. However, linked to the issue of 'emotional openness', the Salford Dadz project seems to offer alternatives to this maladaptive coping for the men when they find themselves in the midst of these challenging life circumstances. Involvement in the project either created alternative ways of coping - through shared enjoyment in activities, reduced isolation, improved self-confidence and esteem, greater engagement with their children - or allowed them the satisfaction gained from sharing alternative ways of coping they had previously developed with other men in the community. This experience acts to facilitate increased responsibility and a concomitant sense of valued identity for many of the men motivating them to become involved in volunteering and employment opportunities that they previously would not have felt skilled or confident to do.

This change in confidence, and the practical changes in helping others and being more involved in the community that accompanied it, was also strongly noted by the women interviewed. To this extent, Salford Dadz was often presented as filling a gap that nothing else currently filled for these men in helping them deal positively with difficult life circumstances and associated negative coping mechanisms. The children and young people specifically noted how their fathers were 'happier' and how this included the pleasure of seeing them engaged in new positive relationships with other men in the community (often described as 'new friends').

Part of the nature of this 'alternative' offered by the work was in creating a different, more salutogenic (health-promoting) space within the community for the men away from previously damaging friendships and settings. From the children and young people's data it was also apparent that the 'stability' and consistency of this alternate setting was an important mechanism in facilitating change. The ability of community embedded projects, delivered in male-sensitive ways, to generate an environment that suggests opportunities for alternative ways of coping and associated reductions in 'lifestyle risk factor' behaviours have been noted in previous work (Robertson et al., 2013). Salford Dadz generates this environment not only through male-sensitive approaches but, increasingly, through male-led approaches. Doing so creates the opportunity for positive practices and coping to be demonstrated and modelled by those involved in Salford Dadz to the wider community and this fits well with the positive deviance model.

## **Interpersonal relationships**

### ***Male/female relations***

Many of the men had experienced difficult relationships with partners and previous partners especially in relation to difficulties in having access to their children. At worst, these difficulties had generated or exacerbated the range of 'maladaptive coping' mechanisms mentioned earlier generally making situations worse for all involved. Despite this, many had a desire to deal with things differently and, as noted above, the project has facilitated this shift for many of these fathers. There was evidence that Salford Dadz had helped improve these relationships for some even when these had previously broken down to the point where they '*couldn't stand each other*' (Rachel). It seems that Salford Dadz helped the men to become more confident parents and, as part of that, to ensure

the focus was on what was best for the children. This then provided common ground for the two parents, especially in terms of neutral or positive things to communicate about, and thereby helped bridge these previous rifts. These improvements in parental relations, and the benefits that it brought, were also noted by some of the children and young people. This further demonstrates the impact of the project beyond the men themselves and provides evidence of the impact on the children of the project.

The women interviewed also appreciated the space Salford Dadz gave them to have time for themselves. Significantly, seeing the work, and especially the changes it generated, helped some of the women develop a more positive view of men; something that they had never really had due to prior experiences. The combined impact of the changes in men's practices, and these shifts in women's perceptions about the assets that men can bring to relationships and to parenting, are likely to have a positive synergistic impact within the community over time.

Whilst some concern was expressed during the first year about aspects of the Salford Dadz work leaving some women feeling alienated or marginalised, the approaches taken to understand and address this seem to have ameliorated much of this through the second year. However, this needs to continue to be an issue that the project is sensitive to. 'Bringing in' the wider community through 'one off' events, such as the Father's Day fete or other activity focused events, perhaps offers a positive way to help women feel more engaged assisting with the management of concerns around marginalisation or alienation.

### *Relations with children*

The positive impact of Salford Dadz on the children was at the forefront of many of the men's and women's accounts as well as being recognised by Unlimited Potential. Moreover, the extent of this impact could not have been clearer than in the data from the children and young people. Improved amounts of time with their dads, improved quality of this time, greater mutual trust and respect and recognised improvements in their own behaviour were all important aspects identified by them. These benefits were not just apparent during engagement with the project but were stated to extend to the home and other areas of life again suggesting a significant impact of the project on the children and young people. Many women also pointed out the positive impact for themselves in terms of having new experiences they could then share with each other as a couple or that the children could share with them on return from their involvement. Time spent involved in Salford Dadz was seen by the women as helping dads gain the practical skills and confidence in taking responsibility for the children in a free and safe environment which then had benefits for the children in expanding their options in terms of available parental support; this notion was supported by the data from the children and young people.

### *Continuity and sustainability*

Concerns were noted in the first evaluation report about possible reliance on the input of Unlimited Potential and the charisma of the Engagement Worker to sustain the success and momentum of the work. The sudden departure of the original Engagement Worker provided an interesting test in relation to this. However, continuity has been well maintained throughout this potentially disruptive period indicating the increasing control, confidence and sense of ownership of the work by the Council of Dadz. This is encouraging evidence in terms of community capacity for the work to continue as Unlimited Potential progress their plans to withdraw further from the work in line with

PD principles. Whilst there is still work to be done in relation to this the formal constituting of the Council of Dadz is a significant step forward in terms of that sense of ownership and the practical running of the Salford Dadz work that follows.

As the dads constituted the group in the spring of 2015, they are now very much leading the work. This chimes with aspects of social movement theory and particularly with the concept of 'bureaucratization' where, as movements develop, they become more formal in terms of 'record keeping, decision-making procedures, and the division of labour' (Staggenborg, 2013). During this phase movements tend to have:

'at least three elements: some type of written document that describes its purpose and operating procedures; a list of members; and three or more levels of internal divisions such as officers, committees, and rank and file members'. (Gamson, 1990 cited in Staggenborg, 2013).

This idea appears to fit with the notion of Salford Dadz now being a 'movement'. This conception may assist Salford Dadz in thinking about how they develop the group and attract further engagement. Social movement theories have ways of conceptualising the level of involvement of different people within it. This framework might provide the group with a way to think about the types of people they need to sustain the group going forwards. There are three suggested levels of participation in movements:

1. Subscribers – passive financial contributors, they support the cause, but not in a practical way
2. Adherents – active members, but irregular in their involvement, although they agree with the goals and motives of the movement or group
3. Activists – active members who are regular in terms of their involvement (Passy, 2003)

It is suggested that the closer a person identifies with a movement, the more intensely they become involved (ibid). Networks, in a social movement sense, can also be important in terms of participation and sustainability; if there is a 'high density of networks' (i.e. more links and connections within the group) then like-minded people are more likely to come together creating what is seen as a 'critical mass' that helps sustain the movement (Crossley, 2008). The relevance of 'critical mass' to Salford Dadz may relate to how they are going to increase the number of people supporting the group in the three ways listed above. This may be required to sustain the group by having enough people to cover the various functions and to help maintain the positive forward momentum that is clearly evident.



### *Tension of an 'inward' and 'outward' focus*



*Picture Facebook post placing Salford Dadz as part of the community*

There have been conscious strategies to avoid labelling Salford Dadz as 'a service' delivered 'to' the men, or as a 'support group' that serves only the relatively small group of men involved. Instead, there is intent to maintain a focus on the programme as one owned by the community and that builds wider community resilience and capacity that then has impact spreading outwards throughout the community.

This continues to be important in terms of creating active participants (who themselves represent the programme) rather than passive recipients (who simply experience it) and links to the earlier point around sustainability. However, it is apparent from the evidence that this is not easy to do when there is pressure from other agencies and residents to call it a 'service' and treat it as such. To help achieve this wider, external focus, the Dadz have made connections with numerous local partners (with greater and lesser degrees of success) and are being approached with increasing regularity to talk about the work through various media outlets (including local press and radio) and at a national NHS Alliance event and at other regional and national events. Social media, particularly Facebook, also continues to be used as a way as a way to engage men (and interestingly women) in the project and is now increasingly being harnessed as a tool to build external (outward facing) alliances across the community with others (e.g. community garden support when vandalised).

## Conclusion

As an evaluation team we would reiterate our conclusions from our earlier evaluation (Woodall et al., 2014) in that we are confident from the evidence gathered that Salford Dadz is making a tangible impact to fathers in Little Hulton and offers a unique service that is not found elsewhere in this community. It is also apparent that the work has improved some of the men's relationships with their partners (or previous partners) and certainly with their children in terms of what they feel confident to provide emotionally and practically for them and in how this is received, recognised and appreciated by the children. The project has developed and evolved, recognising the need to adopt an outward looking focus including linking with other individuals and community groups. Developing such partnerships within and beyond the community is essential for programmes that seek to address underlying health and social inequalities (Green et al., 2015). As the project moves forward, it may be that the original positive deviance framework which shaped practice and ways of working either shifts or becomes replaced with other theoretical frameworks such as social movement theory. Salford Dadz has successfully diversified into other ventures, including the 'Brew and Banter' club and the men's shed initiative – these 'spin-offs' are important in order to sustain fathers' interest, diversify engagement with men with a variety of interests, and to maintain momentum and enthusiasm. What has been noticeable in the second year evaluation is that there has been a tangible shift in the fathers themselves taking greater active control of the direction and strategic vision of Salford Dadz which can only be a positive and desirable outcome. Credit for this must go to the relentless determination of the Project Manager and Engagement Worker who have provided the infrastructure and scaffolding to allow the fathers to feel confident to take Salford Dadz forward into the next phase of its development.



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## **APPENDIX I – Data collection: children and young people**

A Mosaic approach was employed, allowing opportunities for all participants to contribute in a manner which was comfortable and facilitative while responding to the same basic questions. This also created a stimulating environment with varied fun activities.

### ***1 Individual and small group interviews***

Children and young people were offered the opportunity to talk individually or in sibling groups to a researcher. These discussions were audio-recorded. Other informal discussions occurred without recording but researchers made notes about these immediately afterwards.

### ***2 Video-diary booth***

Participants were allowed the opportunity to paint on the walls of this small enclosure before offering a video-record of their thoughts to specific questions, phrased as required for different age groups.

### ***3 “Post-It” wall***

Post-it notes were available for participants to attach to a board with their thoughts and ideas. One young man took on responsibility for gathering more data from others at the event by asking them to write brief notes in sticky notepad sheets for collation by a researcher. Contributors were then asked to prioritise the collection of comments.

### ***4 Play-and-say***

Younger children were encouraged to play while talking to a researcher in the simplest terms about their experience and perceptions.

### ***5 Post-card to the Research Team***

Participants were encouraged or helped to write responses to simplified versions of the research questions on a large-scale post-card to be posted to a recognised figure involved in setting up the project.

### ***6 Wish tree***

Participants were able to write their responses on a paper leaf (with help from a researcher if needed) and hang them on the wish tree.